LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
APR 3 1972
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BT
315
.A84
1931

Christ Is Borne

Angels clap Hands; Let men forbeare to Mourne:
Their *fauing*-Health is come; For Christ is Borne.

Here's a Wonder never knowne,
A King, a Maiesty makes his Throne.
And for Debts which Men should Pay,
Downe his Life at Stake did lay.
Christus Natus est
Hac Nocte.
Quando?
Christ is crucified.
Bethlem.

Harke, what a heauenly Qurre of Angells *fing*
Sweet Carrols, at the birth of this new King.

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
DEC 2 1931
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

By WILLIAM MUIR AULD

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

NEW YORK
1931

COPYRIGHT, 1931,
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

All rights reserved—no part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher.

Set up and printed. Published, October, 1931.

SET UP BY BROWN BROTHERS LINOTYPERS
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE FERRIS PRINTING COMPANY

To

MARGARET

PREFACE

Christmas, despite the many changes which it has undergone in the course of the centuries, is still the most popular festival in the modern world. As it comes round each year the obligation to keep it is strong and widespread, even among those who give small consideration to its spiritual significance and who respond to no call to worship.

Essentially, Christmas is the festival of childhood. "Unto us a *Child* is born" is the soul of the Season. On its annual arrival the religious mind of Christendom turns with alacrity to the Mother and the Babe in the rude stable at Bethlehem. This is altogether praiseworthy. Christian thought and devotion occupied exclusively with the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Cross and Passion, or with the Glorious Mysteries of the Resurrection, can take on a character too somber, or too sublime. At the lowly Manger, confronted with the charm and innocence of His Childhood, faith becomes human and homely, intimate and cheerful, receiving with child-like grace this revelation of

the Father of an infinite majesty, as He essayed to make it to the infantile souls of mankind; while passing, if not wholly devoid of mystic vision, none the less readily through this particular portal into the realm of Eternal Love.

Yet beautiful and touching as the Holy Nativity is, especially to those who hold the faith of the Incarnation, it is only one of the many elements which have entered into Christmas. There are the green garlands, the marvelous tree, the mystic fire and lights, the spirit of giving and receiving, and customs many —still clustering more or less about the great midwinter feast, all of which descend to us from the pagan childhood of the race. Men and women today are not apt to have hearts, dry and shriveled, after the fashion of the immortal Scrooge. They are, perhaps, more prone to appear somewhat sophisticated and to regard themselves intellectually "emancipated" from all pure instinctive attitudes and primitive modes of thought, which Christianity cannot be said to have destroyed, but only to have sublimated. It were surely a mistake to divorce oneself from the spirit characteristic of the childhood of humanity, with its simple emotional response to life and its context, and thus from the minds of the chil-

dren in our own homes. For most, however, such a "deliverance," assuming it to be at all desirable, were as difficult to accomplish, as to lift oneself by one's elbow. Happy, indeed, are they through whose souls course the genial currents of ancient tradition, who with natural and non-rational joy can stoop to drink of the springs of wonder, under the tree and beside the Manger; for they are precisely those who enter abundantly into the kingdom of Christmas and come to know and love the human beauties and the holy mysteries thereof.

The following pages deal largely with old-time beliefs and customs, which are always pleasant to read about; all the more because they do not entirely belong to the past. The elements which enter into them, pagan and Christian, gay and grave, mystical and matter-of-fact, historical and legendary, are blended together, as they have always been in Christmas itself. I have followed my own selective bent. Nothing obtrudes upon the scene in any way calculated to disturb the atmosphere of peace and beauty which belongs to the festival in its more ideal and delightful aspects. I venture to hope that the work will have some appeal to young folks; for many a paragraph has been written with them in view. If to

the individual reader by, and to the family circle around, the old fireside, the chapters make some modest and serene contribution to their enjoyment of a happy Christmas, the end sought in weaving them will have been achieved.

The Carols quoted in whole or in part, particularly in Chapter IV, are taken almost exclusively from *Early English Lyrics,* edited by E. K. (Sir Edmund) Chambers and F. Sidgwick (Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1907). I am deeply grateful to Mr. Sidgwick for permission to use freely this text, for presenting me with a reprint of *The Fifteenth Century Carols of John Audelay,* which first appeared in *The Modern Language Review* (1910-11), and also for the photograph from which the frontispiece was made. At no point have I tampered with the spelling of the old Carols; for therein lies much of their charm, likewise in their quaint thought and wording. Every aid has been afforded so that the reader may move along with ease and celerity.

Though I have only used occasionally *Ancient English Christmas Carols,* by Miss Edith Rickert (Chatto and Windus, London, 1910), I owe much to this book, especially to the valuable notes; and I take this occasion to express my deep apprecia-

tion of the gracious manner in which this editor placed at my disposal the fruits of her toil.

I acknowledge my profound indebtedness to Alexander Tille's *Yule and Christmas* (David Nutt, 1899), to Sir Edmund Chambers' *Mediæval Stage* (2 vols., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1903), and to *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition* (1912) by Clement A. Miles. To come to know the value of these learned authors is to be hesitant about any opinion, or interpretation, which cannot claim their support. For the privilege of making certain important extracts from Mr. Miles' book, which are duly noted, I thank most heartily the copyright owners, Ernest Benn, Limited, London.

If the aspiring student of Christmas themes should honor me by looking into this work, desirous, perhaps, of learning something concerning the nature and scope of the literature, I would direct him to the standard histories, sacred and secular, to relevant articles and references in the great classical and general dictionaries and encyclopædias, to the works of John Brand (1744-1806), William Hone (1780-1842) and Robert Chambers (1802-1871); also to *A Righte Merrie Christmasse!!!* by John Ashton (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd.,

London, n.d.), to W. F. Dawson's *Christmas and Its Associations* (Elliot Stock, London, 1902), and to T. G. Crippen's *Christmas and Christmas Lore* (Blackie and Son, Ltd., London, 1923), which three works, even for the inquirer, render much burrowing in the older sources, often difficult to procure, largely unnecessary; and finally to *The Mediæval Stage* and to *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,* which on account of their superior merit and extensive bibliographies may be taken as almost infallible guides along the highways and byways of the world of Christ-tide, ancient and modern.

The frontispiece is a reproduction of a broadside woodcut, *Christus natus est,* London, 1631, preserved in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. It is singularly interesting in every detail; but is especially notable in that it illustrates the ancient legend of the Animals' Declaration of the Nativity. "The Cock crowed *Christus natus est* (Christ is born); the Raven asked *Quando?* (When?); the Crow replied *Hac nocte* (This night); the Ox cried out *Ubi, ubi?* (Where, where?); the Sheep bleated out *Bethlehem;* and a voice from Heaven sounded *Gloria in Excelsis* (Glory on High.)"

W. M. A.

Christmas Eve, 1930.

CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE 9

CHAPTER I. THE COMING OF CHRISTMAS . . 19

Natal year of Christ—His natal season—Why no Nativity Feast in Apostolic and later times—Epiphany on January 6 first Nativity Feast in Eastern Church—Christmas on December 25 founded in the middle of the fourth century in Rome—Reasons for the choice of the Day—The spread of Christmas.

CHAPTER II. CHRISTMAS AND PAGANISM . . . 34

Christmas at first a purely spiritual festival—As affected by coincident Pagan festivals—The Roman Saturnalia—The Kalends of January—The Northern Yuletide—Loss and gain—The name Christmas.

CHAPTER III. BRINGING HOME CHRISTMAS . . 49

Difficulty of the question, What is a carol?—St. Francis of Assisi the creator of the carol spirit—The Italian Jacopone da Todi bringing home Christmas—A glance at the German medieval carol—John Audelay of Haughmond Abbey and his *cristemas caroles*—The Oxford Book of Carols (1928) and caroling.

CHAPTER IV. ANCIENT ENGLISH CAROLS . . 77

Blossoming period of Carol in England—General subject and character—Annunciation Carols—Floral tributes to Madonna and Child—Carols in medieval religious plays—The charm and mystery of the lullabies—Faith and piety in the ancient carols.

CHAPTER V. THE COLOR OF CHRISTMAS . . . 99

Use of evergreens rooted in Pagan reverence for Nature—Bringing home Christmas—The Church and the evergreens—Romance of holly and ivy—Of mistletoe—Of rosemary—Taking down and disposing of Christmas greenery.

PAGE

CHAPTER VI. IN THE YULE LOG GLOW . . . 116

Sanctity of Christmas Eve—The importance of the Christmas fire—Yule log lighting ceremonies—Make we merry—Burning log and candle sacramental—Smiling hearth the minister of peace and concord—The glowing embers and the departed.

CHAPTER VII. THE CHRISTMAS TREE 135

The crown of Christmas decorations—Sacred trees—Legend of blossoming trees—The Glastonbury thorn and Christmas New Style—Blossoming trees in the home—Artificially decorated trees in Old England—Appearance of present domestic Christmas tree in Germany, its development and spread—Various uses of the Christmas tree and its symbolism.

CHAPTER VIII. CHRISTMAS DELIGHTS . . . 150

Christmas accentuates altruistic emotions—Generosity to animals, birds and poor—Quaint giving customs among friends—The Christmas benefactors of the children—St. Nicholas—Kriss Kringle—Santa Claus—The stocking.

CHAPTER IX. THE CHRISTMAS BELLS 163

Christianity appropriates the bell—Ancient reverence for bells—Bells through Advent to Christmas Eve—The Devil's knell—Legends of sunken bells—Bells after the Reformation—Beneath the Southern Cross—In America.

INDEX 177

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS as almost everyone knows is the annual festival of the Birth of Jesus Christ the Founder of Christianity; but not so many are aware that the traditional date of this important event, 1 A.D., stands greatly in need of correction. The mode of reckoning time "by the year of our Lord," now well-nigh universal in the modern world, was originally introduced by Dionysius Exiguus, who lived in Rome during the first half of the sixth century. Before his day, and until the new system of chronology won general acceptance, happenings were recorded in various ways. Some Church historians took the birth of Abraham as a convenient starting point; others, more commonly those in the West, computed from the founding of the City of Rome (*ab urbe condita* or *anno urbis conditæ*), usually designated by the initial letters A. U. C. Dionysius made his New

Era to begin on the first day of January in the seven hundred fifty-third year from the building of Rome; because in that year he supposed Christ to have been born. Whenever in his writings he desired to indicate the number of years which had elapsed since the Advent of the Savior he employed the phrase *Anno Domini;* and through him it became current. His calculations were adopted with little or no inquiry until the sixteenth century. Since then they have been shown to be wrong by several years. It has proved, however, much easier to detect the error of the learned monk than to correct it; for there is no certain way of arriving at the truth. The Gospels afford practically no decisive assistance. The most useful hint occurs in St. Matthew where it is stated that "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King." According to the best authorities this monarch died a short time before the Jewish Passover 750 A.U.C. It will be evident at once that Dionysius in assigning the Birth of Christ to 753 A.U.C. placed it at least three years too late. Following the slender suggestion of the sacred Evangelist it ought to antedate the death of Herod; but to what point anterior to that occurrence it should be carried no one can say. Some are disposed

to place the Nativity of Christ within the years 748 and 747 A.U.C., that is 5 and 6 B.C.; though others are led by their investigations as far back as 8 B.C.

A similar uncertainty exists in regard to the season of the year to which the epoch-making Birth belongs. In the early Church this provided a fascinating subject for the ingenious mind. Unfettered by any authentic tradition speculation assumed the most fantastic forms. Working with an abstract plan of the ages writers strove to show when they thought the Savior of the world *ought* to have been born, striking often a peculiar preference for the twenty-fifth day, though not always agreeing in their choice of a month. But, as has often been pointed out, there is no month in the calendar to which even "respectable authorities" at one time and another have not been disposed to refer the sacred Birth. The world will never know when that Babe first opened His eyes, whether in the radiant morn of spring, the meridian splendor of summer, the evening glory of autumn, or the bleak midnight of winter. It may be true that Rome would not order a census to be taken, as the Gospels suggest, at the worst possible period for travel, and perhaps truer still that the incident of the shepherds watching over their flocks by night

on the plains of Bethlehem calls for a milder time than the inclement month of December; yet immemorial tradition has now irrevocably rooted the Holy Nativity, and with singular propriety, in the heart of the cold, dark season of the year. As John Milton wrote, so the world is content to think:

> It was the winter wild,
> While the heaven-born child
> All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies.[1]

It is interesting to observe that the process of festival creation in the Christian Church, which dates almost from its inception, began at the end of Christ's life and ministry and slowly worked back to the beginning; so that an observance of His Nativity was comparatively late in making its appearance. As for the first believers they had not the slightest interest in anything of the kind. They looked forward and upward, seldom, if ever, backward. For them the past contained no treasure that the present did not hold in far richer degree; and the future was bright with all-engrossing promise. Hope in the Lord's imminent return from heaven in great power and glory was the flame that fired their devotion,

[1] "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity—The Hymn," 1.

especially when wrapt away from the world in hours of secret fellowship. At such times, when concordant hearts yearned for the grand *dénouement,* all retrospect was precluded, and even a song of Bethlehem, had it been thought of, would have struck a jarring note. The thrill of anticipation found more natural expression in impatient invitatories flung by eager voices toward the dark and silent sky:

> Let Grace come and let the world pass away!
> Hosanna to the God of David, *Marana tha!*
> Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!

Even in much later times when Christians learned to look back as well as forward, and began to estimate aright the historic treasures of the Son of Man, they had small concern in a Nativity Festival. While profoundly interested in the Man Christ Jesus, their thought and affection did not as yet include the Child Jesus. Though speculation might run high concerning the Natal Day of the Savior, that did not mean any deep human appreciation of the Birth in the stable at Bethlehem, nor any great desire to feast it. In fact the very idea of such a celebration appeared to many highly repugnant. It looked too much like regarding their divine Redeemer after the manner of an earthly potentate.

In so far as devotional interest ranged back over the earthly life of Jesus, during the first two hundred years, it tended to stop short at His Baptism, as if the prescriptive Gospel were St. Mark, which begins the story of the Son of God at this point. The occurrence by the Jordan, with its wonderful accompaniments, was considered of supreme importance in the career of the Messiah and around it a feast grew up called Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ's glory, on January 6. The origins of this festival are exceedingly obscure. It is first heard of in connection with certain Basilidian heretics in the second century; but by the fourth century it has found a place in the larger Church, "in the East, in Gaul and probably also in northern Italy." Owing to the extreme vagueness of the term Epiphany it is impossible to tell what its first significance may have been, or even all that entered into it at any time. Some writers call attention to a mystery-religion celebration of the birth of the Æon from the Virgin Kore, which took place on the eve of January 5-6, and suggest that Epiphany may have been created by certain Gnostics as a kind of rival festival. But this, while alluring to the historical imagination, means little more than chasing the subject into an underworld of uncertainty

with nothing better than analogical speculation to guide the footsteps. That Epiphany stood related in some way to the Baptism of Jesus admits of no doubt. But why, it is natural to ask, should this particular experience have been singled out for pre-eminent recognition? There is a reasonable answer to this question. In the early Church the belief was not uncommon that Christ was not born divine, but attained to that dignity and power when He was thirty years old, by virtue of the descent upon Him of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. To those who held these views Epiphany would be the annual commemoration of the deification, or the apotheosis, of Christ, when the voice from heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," or as some old readings phrased it, "This day have I begotten Thee": in other words, the festival of His spiritual birthday. But in the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch, both Arian and Orthodox, at the beginning of the fourth century, it was quite definitely a joint commemoration of the Baptism of the Savior and of His Birth in the *flesh.* In the Jerusalem Church it appears to have had mainly a Bethlehem significance. As far, then, as the East is concerned the Holy Nativity, or Christmas as

we would now say, was first widely observed on January 6 in the festival called Epiphany, and, of course, in a manner distinctly spiritual and religious.

It would be interesting to know how matters fared in these respects with the Christians in Rome; but the whole situation is extremely cloudy. Some think that there December 25 was always the recognized date of the Savior's Birth, while others again do not. Kirsopp Lake, who surveys the whole field with impartial critical skill, will only say: "It is certain that in the East January 6 was the feast of the Nativity, as well as that of the Baptism, and it is probable, though not quite so certain, that the same is true of the West." [3] The evidence is of that elusive sort which hardly permits of historians being positive either one way or the other. At all events, somewhere in the middle of the fourth century, a day, which may or may not be entirely new, destined to be famous thereafter as Christmas, namely December 25, was formally set aside by the Church in Rome for the observance of the physical Birth of Christ. The festival may have been in existence as early as 336; "but farther back than that it cannot be traced."

[3] *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics,* "Epiphany," Vol. V, p. 331a; cf. also art. "Christmas," Vol. III, p. 607ff.

Since by no stretch of imagination can the choice of the day be ascribed to a reliable tradition, why the Church fastened upon it raises an interesting subject; and many points of view are possible. Some have professed to see a well conceived ecclesiastical plan to supplant sooner or later January 1 by the Birthday of Christ as the beginning of the civil year. This may be so; certainly the Church long fostered this ambition; though its efforts were never crowned with complete and permanent success. Doctrinal matters undoubtedly played their part. As theological thought attained greater clarity and definiteness the notion that Jesus became divine at His Baptism was regarded as heretical. Other vagrant fancies required to be combated. By certain sects it was maintained that Jesus, as He appeared among men, was a mere phantasm and had never been born at all. The new festival served to counteract these irregularities of belief, first by emphasizing the Savior's *actual* Birth in the flesh; and second by asserting that His divinity, as well as His humanity, potentially at least, were as real in the manger as at any later period of His life and ministry. It is pleasant to think that the children were not without a share in the creation of Christmas. The practice of

infant baptism had now become almost universal. This somewhat belated recognition of their place in the life and privileges of the Church found its appropriate counterpart in the festal celebration of their Lord.

But there were other reasons, doubtless, which led churchmen to set covetous eyes upon the day. The selection may be seen as a phase of the stern struggle of the Church with the enveloping paganism. According to the Roman calendar, inaugurated by Julius Cæsar in 707 A.U.C., or 45 B.C., December 25 marked the winter solstice when the mighty parent of fertility, having reached its lowest point in the heavens, began again to rise over the world with renewed power and splendor. Among Romans this was known as the *Brumalia,* but what festive significance attached to it at first is not clear. Under the Empire, however, heathendom everywhere tended more and more to focus its devotion on the source of all light and life. Nor were the Emperors, particularly in the third century, slow to capitalize this tendency of thought in the interests of their ideas of absolutism in the state. "The great temple of the Sun," writes Samuel Dill, "which Aurelian, the son of a priestess of the deity, founded on the Campus

Martius, with its high pontiffs and stately ritual, did honor not only to the great lord of the heavenly spheres, but to the monarch who was the august image of his power upon earth and who was endued with his special grace." [3] Under this Emperor (270-275), December 25, when the world annually hovering on the brink of darkness and desolation was saved by the resurgent sun, acquired a new significance. It was called *Dies Natalis Invicti Solis,* the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun. Aurelian had faithful successors in Diocletian, in Constantine the Great before his conversion to the religion of the Cross, and also in Julian, that ill-starred champion of solar paganism. In themselves, however, the cult of the Sun and the worship of the Emperor were not supremely well suited to the needs of the common religious instinct. But what they lacked was amply supplied by Mithraism in its mystical doctrines, its meaningful rites, its ties of brotherhood and its promise of immortality. This strange Eastern faith, whose god Mithra was identified with the Unconquered Sun, long proved the most formidable rival of Christianity. Considering its rapid spread throughout the length and breadth of the Empire, and its

[3] *Roman Society,* p. 586.

strong appeal to the minds of intelligent men, the opinion has been hazarded that, "if the Christian Church had been stricken with some mortal weakness, Mithraism might have become the religion of the western world." But Christ was destined to conquer Mithra; and the victory was to be complete, even to the appropriation of his birthday. *Vicisti Galilæe*—thou hast conquered, O Galilean!

Not much is known of the way in which December 25 was observed in the Empire. It probably had far more significance for the educated and official classes than for the masses. But it was sandwiched, as will be shown later, between two immensely popular folk festivals, the *Saturnalia* and the Kalends of January, which together converted the closing and the opening of the year into one continuous and uproarious carnival. There was obviously a crying need for some important festival around which the faithful might rally, despite the views of those who thought, after the manner of Tertullian, that Christians were and should remain strangers to these Jewish and pagan necessities. It was desirable, not only for the mutual encouragement of the strong, but also as a means of curing in the weak and the unsteady any

hankering after the flesh pots of Egypt which in their passage through the Red Sea of Baptism they were pledged to renounce. The plain and indubitable facts are these: there was no unimpeachable tradition concerning the date of the Savior's Birth; and churchmen chose December 25. If the choice has any meaning at all, it was surely that thereby Christians might be afforded an anchorage in the swirling tide of frivolity, and the thoughtful votaries of Mithra, peradventure, be induced to forsake him and turn to Christ as the true Light of the World. "What more natural," writes Mr. Clement A. Miles, "than that the Church should choose this day to celebrate the rising of her Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings, that she should thus strive to draw away to His worship some adorers of the god whose symbol and representative was the earthly sun!" [4] But when all is said, in the absence of direct evidence, it is not possible to tell just why the Church chose December 25 as the day on which to feast the Birth of her Lord. All the matters alluded to had, doubtless, their due influence. How St. Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (398-403), regarded the matter is, to say the least, interesting; and his views are

[4] *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,* p. 23.

shared by others. In one of his discourses [5] he makes reference to the heathen festival of the sun-god and says:

> On this day also the Birthday of Christ *was lately* fixed at Rome in order that while the heathen were busy with their profane ceremonies the Christians might perform their sacred rites undisturbed. They call this (Dec. 25, or viii. Kal. Jan, as the Romans wrote it), the Birthday of the Invincible One (Mithras); but who so invincible as the Lord? They call it the Birthday of the Solar Disc; but Christ is the Sun of Righteousness.

Once firmly established in Rome Christmas soon found wide acceptance in both East and West; though it does not seem to have been made welcome in Jerusalem till after the sixth century. January 6 robbed of all associations with the actual Nativity was forthwith relegated to a secondary place. In the East, however, it retained its time honored connection with the Lord's Baptism; and it still possesses this significance in the Orthodox Church. The Armenians would have nothing to do with the new

[5] *Hom.* 31.

Roman arrangement for feasting the Birth of Christ; and they sustain this attitude to the present day. They celebrate the Nativity on January 6, as of old, and hold that any other time is heretical. Christmas was carried to the barbarians when in the succeeding centuries they were brought within the fold of the Church. It was taken to the British Isles probably by the Keltic Church, certainly by St. Augustine, 592. Germany received it in 813 from the Synod of Mainz; but it did not pass to Norway till the tenth century, when it was introduced by King Hakon the Good. That the newly inaugurated festival should not be lacking in splendor and appeal the days between December 25 and January 6 were caught up into one holy season, with the Birth of the divine Child at the beginning and the coming of the Magi at the end. In Rome this season from Christmas to Epiphany was known as the twelve day period; but among the peoples of the North, who reckoned by nights instead of by days, it became the famous *twelve nights* of the historic Christmastide.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTMAS AND PAGANISM

WHEN Christmas first arose it was a purely spiritual festival. It had none of the gay and colorful concomitants which it now possesses. No bells announced the arrival of the glad morn; no garlands of green obtruded themselves upon the scene; no friends gathered around tables laden with "good cheer." It was a fast of the senses and a feast of the soul. Bethlehem, bathed in supernal light, was the exclusive object of wonder. The great Latin hymn writers of the period, St. Ambrose, Sedulius, and Prudentius, have only one theme—the sublime mystery of the Incarnation:

> Oh that Birth for ever blessèd!
> When the Virgin, full of grace,
> By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
> Bare the Saviour of our race,
> And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
> First reveal'd His sacred face,
> Evermore and evermore.

O ye heights of heav'n, adore Him:
Angel-hosts, His praises sing;
Powers, Dominions, bow before Him,
And extol our God and King:
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore.[1]

But Christmas was not to remain in this upper air of adoration, save for monks and mystics and later the Puritans. Through contact with the festive environments in which it grew up, and into which it was afterwards to be carried, it was to become mundane and material, happy and merry, ruddy and lusty; though never to the exclusion of reverent remembrance of Him who "came forth from the court and bower of chastity" to bless and save mankind. The dreaded Mithraism passed away leaving few marks on the Nativity celebration of its successful rival; but the same thing cannot be said of certain other festivals which closed and opened the year among the Romans and Germanics.

One of the most important of these was the *Saturnalia,* which lasted from the seventeenth to the

[1] Vv. 4 and 5 of Prudentius' *"Corde natus ex Parentis"* (Of the Father's Love Begotten), *Hymns Ancient and Modern,* hist. ed., p. 75.

twenty-fourth of December. Saturn, in whose honor this feast was held, was the oldest and most benign deity in ancient Italy and was fabled to have reigned during the Golden Age. This was conceived by the Romans as a pastoral era in which plenty abounded. So far nothing had appeared to corrupt the innocence and mar the peace and happiness of mankind. But since that time the world had gone from bad to worse. The lust of gold and the lust of blood had brought disastrous evils in their train. The dream of an Age of Gold was widespread in the pre-Christian world. Greeks taught men to think of it as followed by the Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages, which marked a steady declension and degeneration on the part of mankind. This, however, was altogether too pessimistic a philosophy to remain permanently unmodified; so the straight line of descent becomes a cycle betokening the eventual return of the Golden Era. Many are familiar with the prospective faith of Israel as expressed in the prophetical and apocalyptic writings of the Jews, in and out of the Old Testament; but the heathen world was not without hopes of the approaching regeneration of mankind. In his *Fourth Eclogue,* written about 40 B.C., with possibly the expected child of Octavian in mind, Virgil gave

beautiful expression to the spirit of Gentile expectancy:

Lo! the last age of Cumæ's seer has come:
Again the great millennial æon dawns.
Once more appears the hallowed maid, once more
Kind Saturn reigns; and from high heaven descending
Comes a new offspring. But do thou, we pray,
Pure goddess, by whose grace on infant eyes
Daylight first breaks, smile softly on this babe.
For in his time the age of iron shall cease
And golden generations fill the world.[2]

As the *Saturnalia* returned each year it brought with it thoughts of the peaceful reign of Saturn long, long ago, when all men were happy and all men were good; and to some in Christian times, no doubt, the quiet certainty that the poet's dream had been realized, though not by a child born in the imperial palace, but in the dark cave at Bethlehem. The approach of the feast was hailed by the Romans in the Empire with wild joy. Few failed to respond to the call, *Io Saturnalia! Io Saturnalia!* Work of every kind ceased, except cooking. The schools were closed and the children had a day set apart for themselves. War was never declared during the happy

[2] This beautiful translation is by Professor R. S. Conway, Litt. D.

season; and if hostilities were in progress they were suspended till the feast was over. Public places were decked with flowers and shrubs. The practice of giving and receiving presents was almost as common then as it is now at Christmas. Some of these gifts, little clay dolls and candles, were purchased at a kind of fair where they were displayed for sale. Mirth and frolic were indulged in by all without restraint. In their revels they were often led by a *rex Saturnalitius,* a kind of mock king, chosen by lot, who had the power to issue to his subjects the most ludicrous commands which they must obey, even if it meant standing on their heads divested of all their clothing. But the soul of the season lay not so much in these things as in a temporary sense of brotherhood which prevailed. The spirit of Saturn and his Golden Age shone out most clearly as masters and mistresses dined and made merry with their slaves and servants and for the time being treated them as their equals. It will scarcely be necessary to point out that much of the spirit of this old Roman festival passed into Christmas celebration, especially among English-speaking peoples. The early Puritans witnessing the jolly escapades of the grotesque fools, the Lords of merry disport, had never any doubt in the

matter, as their fiery diatribes might show. That transient feeling which blossoms at Christmas time, and has for centuries, into the determination that the poor and the unfortunate must have "a good time for once in the year" owes as much to the kind Saturn as to the loving Son of Man. This is the Christmas which, "mixed with a little sentimental Christianity," lies so pleasantly in the genial pages of Dickens. The following fifteenth-century description of the season when the people, not only lewid but genteel, would do nothing else all the twelve days but eat, drink and be merry is thoroughly saturnalian:

The lewid peple than algates agre,
And caroles singen everi' criste messe tyde,
Not with schamfastenes bot jocondle,
And holey bowghes aboute; and al asydde
The brenning fyre hem eten, and hem drinke,
And laughen mereli, and maken route,
And pype, and dansen, and hem rage; ne swinke,
Ne noe thynge els, twalue daye' thei woldè not.[8]

Another festive time, equally important in the Roman Empire, was associated with the Kalends of January. From the time of Julius Cæsar January 1

[8] William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described,* p. 90. *Algates,* always. *Brenning,* burning. *Swinke,* labor.

marked the beginning of the civil year and was a holiday season. Consuls were then inducted into office; and for at least three days feasting and merriment prevailed. Mummers clad in women's clothes and animal skins paraded the streets. In many respects this feast resembled the *Saturnalia;* in fact, together they formed one continuous time of festivity. But it had some features peculiar to itself; and these were bound up with the good wishes for happiness and prosperity which were commonly extended. What one desired for another was expressed by the kind of presents given: "honeyed things, that the year of the recipient might be full of sweetness, lamps that it might be full of light, copper, silver and gold that wealth might flow in amain." [3a] The nature and popularity of the festival is well set forth by Libanius, the friend and instructor of St. Chrysostom. This ancient Sophist might be writing about Christmas in the modern world:

> The festival of the Kalends is celebrated everywhere as far as the limits of the Roman Empire extend. . . . The impulse to spend seizes everyone. . . . People are not only gen-

[3a] E. K. Chambers, *Mediæval Stage,* Vol. I, p. 238.

> erous towards themselves, but also towards their fellow-men. A stream of presents pours itself out on all sides. . . . The Kalends festival banishes all that is connected with toil, and allows men to give themselves up to undisturbed enjoyment. From the minds of young people it removes two kinds of dread: the dread of the schoolmaster and the dread of the stern pedagogue. . . . Another great quality of the festival is that it teaches men not to hold too fast to their money, but to part with it and let it pass into other hands.'

Turning to the barbarians in the northern parts of Europe, the great festival with which Christmas had to contend was called Yule. The name has received more than its share of attention by antiquarians and philologists; but the tendency now is to confess complete ignorance of its origin. Formerly it was the custom to trace it back to the Anglo-Saxon word hwéol (wheel), under the belief that it bore some relationship to the circular course of the sun through the wheeling points of the solstices and equinoxes; but modern research has tended to dissipate this

' C. A. Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,* p. 168.

meaning. It has been shown that the old Germanic peoples knew so little about solstices and equinoxes that they did not even have names for them. These conceptions they acquired from the Romans; and the terms they employ are translations of Latin denominations. Alexander Tille is quite explicit in the matter: "There never was a Germanic solstice celebration, and December 25, the pseudo winter solstice of the Julian calendar, was no Germanic festive day until after the contact of the Germanic tribes with the Romans." [5] December 25 did not evidently usher in the New Year among Saxon and other Northern peoples, and so feasted, as has often been said and written. The old Celtic year began at the beginning of November with the feast of *Samhain,* which probably means summer end, while the Germanic year commenced about ten days later. Yule, we are to understand, did not describe the festival of a day, but a two months' period, stretching from the middle of November to the middle of January. Prior to the eleventh century there appears not to be the barest suggestion that December 25 was called Yule. Some will immediately think of the Venerable Bede's

[5] *Yule and Christmas,* p. 216.

description of the eve as *Modra-necht* (Mother's night), often taken as meaning the parent of other nights, that is, the New Year, and synonymous with Yule. But few scholars would now be found to explain the reference after that manner, or to associate the night and its ceremonies with the god Thor. "It would be tempting," writes Sir Edmund Chambers, "to interpret this as 'the night which gave birth to the year'; but philologists say that it can only mean 'night of mothers,' and we must therefore explain it as due to some cult of the *Matres* or triad of mother-goddesses, which took place at the feast." [6] *After* the barbarians were Christianized December 25 became among them an important day. All the customs and superstitions which had belonged from time immemorial to their own Yuletide, and all that they had imbibed from the Romans, began to cluster about it. They had, indeed, little to learn from any in the way of riotous celebration. In *Marmion* Sir Walter Scott has vividly described their festive mood; and with his lines in mind the meaning of Yule as noise and clamor has much to be said for it:

[6] *The Mediæval Stage,* Vol. I, p. 231.

Even heathen yet, the savage Dane
At Iol more deep the mead did drain;
High on the beach his galleys drew,
And feasted all his pirate crew;
Then in his low and pine-built hall,
Where shields and axes decked the wall,
They gorged upon the half-dressed steer;
Caroused in seas of sable beer;
While round, in brutal jest, were thrown
The half-gnawed rib, and marrow-bone;
Or listened all, in grim delight,
While scalds yelled out the joys of fight.
Then forth, in frenzy, would they hie,
While wildly-loose their red locks fly,
And dancing round the blazing pile,
They make such barbarous mirth and while,
As best might to the mind recal
The boisterous joys of Odin's hall.[7]

This is no doubt the kind of merry making that was so rudely disturbed at the village of the *Marsi,* on a crisp, clear evening early in November, 14 A.D. Germanicus, the Roman general, supposed to have retired into winter quarters with his legions, burst suddenly in upon some German tribes and turned their wild revelry into wilder confusion. It may well have been a New Year's festival in which they were engaged. If so, it would be a happy and hilarious

[7] Intro. Sixth Canto.

one, and a mere prelude to many more. In those days as winter approached and the pastures became closed to the flocks, no means having as yet been devised to keep stock alive till the spring, a great slaughter was inevitable, followed by voracious feastings. This old November killing, and the subsequent gormandizing, is the background of the material aspect of Christmas. "The show of slaughtered beasts adorned with green garlands in an English town just before Christmas" reminds some strongly of these ancient gory feasts, as, no doubt, would American marts with their hecatombs of turkeys. The odoriferous barbecues of the edacious Northerners became the medieval Yule board with its plethora of reeking carnal fare. The modern Christmas dinner, however sumptuous, is but a pale reflection of both.

These, then, are the most important festivals with which Christmas had to contend when it came into being and was taken among the peoples of Europe. For many a day the Church fought bitterly their excesses and superstitions, especially those bound up with the Kalends and Yule. The nonsensical mummery of the one and the orgiastic license of the other shocked the austere heralds of the Cross, just as

they did the Puritans of later times causing them to accomplish temporarily the abolition of Christmas. But burning denunciations and threats of excommunication failed to wean the barbarians from their heathen modes of rejoicing. It was discovered that they were far more ready to abandon their gods and the dates of their festivals than to change their habits and manners. In fact, the festive board was to prove the least susceptible of all to spiritual transformation. Like those cold, gray earth clouds, which hang beneath the setting sun and refuse the slightest tint of gold or vermilion; so the historic Yule table was to remain for the most part impervious to the illuminating and transcoloring light of Christmas. Ideally in Christianity every meal is a sacrament; yet the mysticism of food has required an altar, or table, apart, where, through material sparseness and hallowing associations, the mind might more readily reach out to the higher and holier realities symbolized. Still the Christianizing work went on; and some things were accomplished. The pagan deities were all slain and entombed in the days of the week and in the months of the year. Those customs which could not be uprooted and destroyed were absorbed and given a Christian name and interpretation, and

as such survive in many instances to the present day. No doubt there was loss as well as gain. As ideally conceived the Feast was intended to be a purely spiritual pilgrimage over the sacred archway from the Nativity to Epiphany—a watching with the shepherds, a rejoicing with the angels and a worshiping with the kings. But it could hardly escape the influence of its environment, any more than can mortal man. What it could not extricate itself from it nobly sought to consecrate. The heathen contributions now are precisely those which lend to Christmas much of its warm color and human charm. When the season calls up in the mind crackling fires on the hearth, lighted candles, rooms adorned with evergreens, bright berries and flowers, wholesome feast and frolic—these are the genuine pagan elements which once drawn within the hallowing circle have been loath to leave and many surely hope they never will.

The word Christmas which covers all this is as distinctly English, as *Weihnacht* is German and *Noël* French. It is no older than the twelfth century and came into use, no doubt, through the medieval custom of celebrating Mass at midnight on Christmas Eve, the only time in the year when this was permitted, as Sir Walter Scott reminds us:

> On Christmas Eve the bells were rung,
> On Christmas Eve the Mass was sung:
> That only night in all the year
> Saw the stoled priest his chalice rear.[8]

In itself the name is quite colorless; but by its many happy and holy associations it has become to all English-speaking peoples both radiant and redolent with the religious romance of the ages.

[8] *Marmion,* as above.

CHAPTER III

BRINGING HOME CHRISTMAS

THE sweetest sounding name for Christmas song in English is "carol." It comes down the centuries laden with the happy memories of the great mid-winter feast and is as deeply woven into its romance as the evergreens and the Yule log. The question, What is a carol? is often asked; but a simple answer is by no means easy to give. The very term itself has occasioned much comment; but "it is clearly associated at first with the idea of choric song." [1] In the Preface to *The Oxford Book of Carols,* Percy Dearmer writes: "The word 'carol' once meant to dance in a ring: it may go back, through the Old French *'caroler'* and the Latin 'CHORAULA,' to the Greek 'CHORAULES,' a flute player for chorus dancing, and ultimately to the 'CHOROS' which was originally a circling dance and the origin of the Attic drama." [2]

[1] Edith Rickert, *Ancient English Christmas Carols,* p. xiv.

[2] P. v.

In France in the twelfth century the word denoted an "amorous song dance which hailed the coming of Spring," and in Italy at the same period it meant "a ring or song dance." By Dante this conception of caroling is carried up into the Heaven of the Fixed Stars and transfigured. There in that realm of perfect love he sees groups of holy and translucent souls form themselves into *carole,* that is, choirs, who, expressive of the harmony and joy of the supernal life, dance and sing before him and around the radiant Beatrice. Sometime during the thirteenth century the French word *carole* passed into English in its normal nonreligious sense. In Chaucer dancing and caroling are synonymous terms:

> Upon the carole wonder faste
> I gan biholde; till atte laste
> A lady gan me for to espye,
> And she was cleped Curtesye . . .
> Ful curteisly she called me,
> "What do ye there, beau sire?" quod she,
> "Come [nere], and if it lyke yow
> To dauncen, daunceth with us now"
> And I, withoute tarying,
> Wente into the caroling.[8]

[8] Skeat's *Student Chaucer,* "The Romaunt of the Rose," p. 9, ll. 793-804. *Faste,* eagerly. *Cleped,* called.

It seems as if the word ought to have continued in this secular atmosphere; but by the beginning of the fifteenth century it comes to be applied in an increasingly exclusive manner to Christmas songs, sacred and secular alike. Some explanation of its appropriation in this connection may be due to the fact that many of the earliest examples were modeled after the form of these old French *caroles.*[4] Certainly the spirit of the dance is unmistakably present in not a few. But some again, as for example lullabies and those of a lyric stamp, convey little suggestion of this kind; while others wind out their tale with all the naïve simplicity of the typical ballad. In fact, like ballads, carols are of many kinds. As to what one will enjoy, and be willing to ascribe the name to in either case, is largely a matter of taste. On the one hand, they range from the most winsome creations to the vagabond and salacious types; on the other they run all the way from the sublime to the ridiculous and even to the gross. Though one may not have the temerity to venture upon definition, some account can be given of the origin and nature of the sacred type. By way of anticipation it may be said that the spirit of the religious carol in its purest form is, perhaps,

[4] *Early English Lyrics,* p. 293.

best suggested by the happy singing of birds in the springtime at break-morn in the forest, or in some wooded dell:

Hark! how the cheerefull birds do chaunt theyr laies,
And carroll of loves praise.
The merry Larke hir mattins sings aloft;
The Thrush replyes; the Mavis descant playes;
The Ouzell shrills; the Ruddock warbles soft;
So goodly all agree with sweet consent
To this dayes merriment.[5]

But before the Christmas minstrels could arise to render melodious the spiritual joy of the Season, Bethlehem had to be rediscovered. How this came to pass is a matter that claims the attention of all interested in that species of song properly called the Christmas Carol.

Beyond all doubt the most important event in the religious life of Western Christendom in the Middle Ages was the birth of Francis of Assisi in 1182. Nor is this to forget the many great names which adorn the time in different lands. To the period belong St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante, before whom the mind must always make reverent pause. Through them the moral and spiritual soul of the medieval

[5] Edmund Spenser, *Epithalamium,* ll. 78-84.

Church found incomparable expression: the one offering the fruits of his genius in profound, analytical and argumentative prose, the other in subtle, soaring and glorious poetry. But neither the creator of the *Summa Theologica,* nor the author of the *Divina Commedia,* exercised that direct, salutary and recreative influence on the common heart which is true of St. Francis. Prior to the rise of this remarkable man Christianity did not mean much to the plain folks anywhere in Europe, and Christmas in a spiritual sense little or nothing at all. The sacred rites of the Church, couched in a language poorly understood, as had not been altogether the case in England before the coming of the Norman French, were followed with only the vaguest notion of their import and meaning. Efforts, indeed, had been made from time to time to enable the faithful to enter intelligently into the Latin services; but by many it was not considered in the least degree essential that they should know what was being said and done. The prevalent conception of religion was scarcely of the kind to attract the average person. It was somber, abstract and singularly lacking in popular appeal. In His historical aspects Christ was the thorn-crowned Savior, whose "cruel wounds un-

staunched and bleeding yet" engrossed the attention of all. Over the whole medieval world lay the broad shadow of the Cross. In His present capacities and powers Christ was the Author of Salvation, the Deliverer from the pains of eternal death and the awful Judge of mankind, whose tenderer offices had been transferred to the *Mater Salutaris*. A finer type of faith could be found behind the monastery walls; for thither the more serious minded were apt to betake themselves. There, if real athletes of the spirit and unafflicted by soul weariness, or other sadder impediments, the celestial ladder leading to the marriage of the soul with Christ the Heavenly Bridegroom challenged ascent. Though such devotion could not be emulated by the many, either within or without the cloister, that did not destroy then, nor does it now, its witness to the supremacy of the spiritual and to the great cost involved in achieving pure holiness of life—"that perfect correspondence of the human soul with the Eternal." Neither Christianity, nor Christmas, however, had yet been shaped to touch the lives of lay folk. They both passed over them like a winter sun behind clouds. But spring with its flowers and singing of birds was at hand. It came with the radiant Francis. By "that profound popu-

lar instinct which enabled him, more than any man since the primitive age, to fit religion for popular use," [6] he succeeded in linking the common heart to the happy humanities of Jesus. Caring for little else, though disputing nothing, than the human side of the Lord's life and ministry, he recovers for his age something of the original romance of the Gospel and with it the brightness of heaven and earth. "Wherever he goes," writes Lonsdale Ragg, "he carries with him sunshine and fresh air and living water. Fresh from the pure fountain of the Gospel precepts, which he interprets with a childlike literalness, he passes along, he and Poverty his bride, beaming with love, and inspiring holy thoughts by his very look." [7]

Toward the close of his all too brief apostolate two scenes in our Lord's career, Bethlehem and Calvary, engaged his deepest attention. Before the vision of the Cross came to him on Mount Alverno, leaving upon his body the *stigmata* of the crucified Redeemer, he had planned to observe to the very life the memories of the Holy Nativity. The place

[6] Mattthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (First Series), VI, *Pagan and Mediæval Religious Sentiment,* p. 210.
[7] *Dante and His Italy,* p. 94.

chosen was Greccio, not far from Assisi, in the year 1223. Mrs. Oliphant writes:

> In this village, when the eve of the Nativity approached, Francis instructed a certain grave and worthy man, called Giovanni, to prepare an ox and an ass, along with a manger and all the common fittings of a stable, for his use, in the church. When the solemn night arrived, Francis and his brethren arranged all these things into a visible representation of the occurrences of the night at Bethlehem. The manger was filled with hay, the animals were led into their places; the scene was prepared as we see it now through all the churches of Southern Italy—a reproduction, as far as the people know how, in startling realistic detail, of the surroundings of the first Christmas.[8]

This dramatic vigil in the forest chapel lingered like a gracious memory among the Sons of Francis. They had learned much from their master; they were to learn still more; but this event brought home to their hearts in an unforgettable manner the human side of the Birth in Bethlehem. For them Greccio

[8] *Francis of Assisi,* p. 223.

marked the renascence of Christmas. Henceforth it will have a meaning for all Christendom that it never had before, especially after the writings of St. Bonaventura have spread far and wide the Franciscan Gospel. No longer will it seem natural or proper to speak "of the Divine Child as one speaks of a dogma, or of the Mother either as a dogma, or as a moral example." Theological rhetoric will give way for lyric poetry in which the "pious imagination will form pictures of the Mother's affection and the Child's lovableness." In other words, Greccio, or rather the heart of the Blessed Francis, is the cradle of the Christmas Carol, for out of the new appreciation of the Nativity which he there engendered this type of song sprang. Something of the kind had appeared once before, as Yrjö Hirn reminds us. Ephraim Syrus, the fourth-century Eastern poet, in his *Hymni de nativitate Christi in carne,* had "expressed a purely personal and almost dramatically vivid conception of the Holy Mother's loving play with her Child" [9]; but in the succeeding centuries they were entirely forgotten. Incarnation poetry followed the lead of St. Ambrose whose type of Christmas song, rhetorically splendid and abstractly the-

[9] *The Sacred Shrine,* p. 367.

ological, held sway in the Church till Francis originated, or reinstituted, the cult of the Holy Manger. Then a warm breath as of spring passed over Europe and the carol—"the folk-tune, the secular song adapted to a sacred theme"—sprang up everywhere.

The first Franciscan of genius who lifted up his lyric voice in order to bring Christmas a little nearer home to the people was the Italian Jacopone da Todi (1228-1306). Noble by birth, and educated to the legal profession, in early middle life he sharply and finally turned his back upon fame and fortune. Shocked out of his worldly, pleasure loving and religiously indifferent life, by the tragic death of his beautiful and saintly wife, he wheeled completely round and in the path of poverty and renunciation set his face steadfastly toward God. In the most assured way to achieve success, particularly when old habits are to be broken up and new ones formed, he swung into the spiritual life with a violent ardor, behaving often in a manner that laid him open to the charge of madness. Mad he must have seemed to some of his contemporaries, as certainly he would appear to many moderns who so "easily confuse enthusiasm with insanity: especially that reckless en-

thusiasm which sacrifices dignity to ideal ends." But it is the soul of the man that commands attention. To see and understand this with sympathy is to pass beyond his eccentricities and feel strangely stirred by a man "drunken with the love and compassion of Christ," crazed with devotion to his Lord and Master, whose *santa pazia* flowered in sanctity and service and also in noble poetry, warranting the remark: *"S' è pazzo, è pazzo come l' allodola"* (If he is mad he is mad as the lark). This wild turbulent aspect of the man is, perhaps, the one best known. It is the one celebrated on his tomb, *Stultus propter Christum, nova mundum arte delusit et cœlum rapuit* (A fool for Christ's sake, by a new artifice, cheated the world and took heaven by storm). But Miss Evelyn Underhill's inspiring interpretation of his spiritual development, as disclosed in his poetry, shows another side. In her biography he appears not only as a poet of high quality, a most brilliant star in the Franciscan Constellation, but also one of the great mystics of the medieval Church. He waged his spiritual battle, none more earnestly, but eventually he rose above the dust and din of conflict, passed even beyond his *santa pazia,* and knew at last that

ineffable peace and nameless vision which attend the fruition of mystic contemplation:

> The battle is over now,
> The travail that drains the blood,
> The spirit's struggle for good,—
> Peace hath ended the war.
> With his helmet on his brow,
> Behold the spirit renewed,
> With tempered armour endued,
> Wound cannot hurt him nor scar,
> He looks on the radiance afar,
> Asks not for symbol or sign;
> No tapers of sense may shine,
> On those heights of Eternity.[10]

Yet by far the most beautiful and winsome side of the poet appears in his charming Christmas verse. Here, at least, the sanity of his saintliness shines forth, while his mysticism becomes no less apparent. Many are familiar with the *Stabat Mater dolorosa,* attributed to Jacopone, and acclaimed the most poignant of all Latin Passion hymns; but it is not so well known that it possesses a jubilant Christmas pendant —*Stabat Mater speciosa.* Contrasting this joyous song with the sorrowful one Paul Sabatier writes: "The sentiment is even more tender, and it is hard to explain its neglect except by an unjust caprice of

[10] Evelyn Underhill, *Jacopone da Todi,* p. 489. Translation by Mrs. Theodore Beck.

fate." [11] These few lines from J. M. Neale's translation will indicate its spirit:

> Full of beauty stood the Mother,
> By the Manger, blest o'er other,
> Where her little One she lays,
> For her inmost soul's elation,
> In its fervid jubilation,
> Thrills with ecstasy of praise.[12]

But like Dante, Jacopone found the common speech a more fluent medium of poetical expression. In the Italian tongue he wrote his ascetic, mystical and Christmas songs. Alluding to the Nativity poems Miss Underhill ranks them "among the most perfect creations of thirteenth-century feeling; expressing that assured faith, that tenderness and intimacy, that happy enjoyment of Christ, of which St. Francis, in such an incident as the setting up of the Crib at Greccio, had been the perfect interpreter." She proceeds to note their characteristics: "the spirit of play, the accent of romance, a new delicate joy in the human aspect of the Incarnation, in the flowering

[11] *Life of St. Francis,* p. 286. N. B. Some songs hereafter cited, or alluded to, may be by Jacopone's followers and imitators; but in any case they and the master's are all illustrative of the new Franciscan appreciation of the Nativity.

[12] For Thomas Walsh's translation see *Catholic Anthology,* p. 73f.

of Christ for the renewing of Man's faded fields." [13] In these happy songs Jacopone is not extolling Lady Poverty, or the delicious transports of Love, but bending in adoring wonder over *Dio fatto piccino* (God made a little thing). In deep mystic mood he gazes into that *magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum* at Bethlehem till

> The earth and all the skiey space
> Break into flowery smiles—

and not only into smiles, but into the most ravishing harmonies, which he is sure we too might hear did we but *listen.* The Sacred Babe comes through the portal of birth, not trailing clouds of glory, but like a sweet and fragrant lily, transplanted, as it were, from the celestial paradise to the garden of humanity, there to bloom in unearthly beauty and release among men the subtle aroma of heaven:

> Egli è lo giglio de l'umanitade,
> de suavitate—
> e de perfetto odore.
> Odor divino da ciel n'ha recato,
> da quel giardino là ove era piantato.[14]

[13] *Op. cit.,* p. 146.

[14] He is the flower-de-luce of humanity, of delicate and perfect fragrance. Divine sweetness from heaven he has brought, from that garden there where he was planted. (*Le Laude,* da Todi, seconda edizione riveduta e aggiornata, da S. Caramella, Bari, 1930, C., p. 243.)

To the plain people Bethlehem seemed far away. They missed the magnificent strains of the Latin hymns and offices. He would bring the Nativity near, near, right home to their hearts, as the Blessed Francis had dramatically done at Greccio. "Come" he sings again in words which suggest, and may well have inspired, many a celebrated painting:

Come and look upon her child
Nestling in the hay!
See his fair arms opened wide,
On her lap to play!
And she tucks him by her side,
Cloaks him as she may;
Gives her paps unto his mouth,
Where his lips are laid . . .

She with left hand cradling
Rocked and hushed her boy,
And with holy lullabies
Quieted her toy . . .
Little angels all around
Danced, and carols flung;
Making verselets sweet and true,
Still of love they sung.[18]

The picture is perfect, recalling Crashaw's striking line:

'Twas once look up, 'tis now look down to Heaven.[19]

[18] John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy, Italian Literature,* Pt. I, Appendix IV, p. 469f.

[19] "On the Blessed Virgin's Bashfulness."

Yet, as already hinted, it would be a great mistake to think of Jacopone, St. Francis, or any early Minorite, as sensible only to the human charm and pathos of the Nativity. They also felt it, so to speak, in their numinous consciousness, as holy, wonderful, mysterious and awe-inspiring. It is this peculiar blending, absent in the ancient Latin hymns, of homely feeling and numinous feeling, or as Yrjö Hirn would phrase it, "pious familiarity and reverent worship," that is the striking thing. Precisely that for which the Christmas Collect renders thanks—"the shining forth of the mysterious divine light from the bosom of Eternity" in the face of the Infant Christ—is what the poet and others see, but with an intimate and tender realism all their own. A real Child is pictured lying naked in the thorny hay (*nudo nel pungente spino*), who kicks and cries to tears; but the dear angels (*gli Angeli diletti*) are described caroling around Him with bashful wonder (*tutti riverenti timidi e subietti*); because after all He is the little Infant Prince of the elect (*Bambolino principe de gli eletti*), a *huomo divino,* A Divine Man. The temper of mind involved is difficult to describe fully. But in addition to Rudolf Otto's sense of the holy, it is akin to what Wordsworth calls "natural

piety" and Ruskin *theoria,* the mood of reverent contemplation, which appreciates the golden glory of old romance, discerns

> That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move,[17]

produced the original Idylls of Bethlehem—those "matchless pictures of earthly beauty and pathos illumined and sublimed by heavenly love," conceived and communicated to that most hallowed Gospel of St. John its deathless transcendental glamour. Nor does our rough, roving minstrel miss the fullness of the Christmas message; for he was a preacher of fine evangelical fervor. He will sing wondrously of the Nativity, as in his *Cantico de la Nativitá de Iesú Cristo,* in strains that remind one of Paul Gerhardt's "All my heart this night rejoices"; but ere his song is done he will cry:

> O ye sinners, erring throng,
> Serving evil lords so long,
> Come and hail this Infant Birth!
>
> * * * *
>
> Come to Him in penitence.
> Penitence your hearts shall stay,
> Driving every sin away,
> Purging heart, and soul, and sense.

[17] Shelley, *Adonais,* LIV.

Verily the humble mind
Penitent, the truth shall find,
Blessedness and piety.[18]

Sometimes the message is couched in more kindly notes, thus passing the more readily in at lowly doors; and to that end chiefly Jacopone and his followers tuned their rustic Christmas lyres:

Now since He's here,
Show your heart's cheer
And high content . . .
Sweep hearth and floor;
Be all your vessels' store
Shining and clean.
Then bring the little guest
And give Him of your best
Of meat and drink. Yet more
Ye owe than meat.
One gift at your King's feet
Lay now. I mean
A heart full to the brim
Of love, and all for Him,
And from all envy clean.[19]

Mr. Clement A. Miles, in his *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,*[20] gives numerous examples of these

[18] Evelyn Underhill, *Jacopone da Todi,* p. 417. Translated by Mrs. Theodore Beck.
[19] A. Macdonell, *Sons of Francis,* pp. 371-2.
[20] Chapters II and III.

fresh and fragrant lyrics, wild flowers of song he calls them, gathered in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, England, and even in "dour Scotland." The German medieval carols are peculiarly interesting. Jacopone's little angels hovering around are not so noticeable; but the kindly sentiments which breathe through them are certainly unique and suggest scenes of cotters' homes, which only Robert Burns could describe:

> Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
> Th' expectant wee things, toddlin' . . .
> To meet their dad, wi' flichterin' noise an' glee.
> His wee bit ingle, blinkin' bonnily,
> His clean hearth-stane, his thrifty wifie's smile . . .

Into such surroundings the Christ Child is welcomed by all; and to these singers farther north there is always an intense sense of the cold on the first *Weihnacht:*

> Da Jesu Krist geboren wart,
> do was es kalt.

The fourteenth-century allegorical carol beginning, *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen,* familiar in Miss Catherine Winkworth's rendering: "A spotless rose is blowing,"[21] is still popular at Christmas time all

[21] *Christian Singers of Germany,* p. 85.

over the world; but it is not so good a sample of the German rustic carol of the Middle Ages as this one:

Das Kind is in der Krippen glögn,
So herzig und so rar!
Mei klâner Hansl war nix dgögn,
Wenn a glei schener war.
Kolschwarz wie d'Kirchen d'Augen sein,
Sunst aber kreidenweiss;
Die Händ so hübsch recht zart und fein,
I hans angrürt mit Fleiss.

Aft hats auf mi an Schmutza gmacht,
An Höscheza darzue;
O warst du mein, hoan i gedacht,
Werst wol a munter Bue.
Dahoam in meiner Kachelstub
Liess i brav hoazen ein,
Do in den Stâl kimt überâl
Der kalte Wind herein."

The Franciscans entered England in the year 1224;

" The Child is laid in the crib, so hearty and so rare! My little Hans would be nothing by His side, were he finer than he is. Coal-black as cherries are His eyes, the rest of Him is white as chalk. His pretty hands are right tender and delicate, I touched Him carefully. Then He gave me a smile and a deep sigh too. If you were mine, thought I, you'd grow a merry boy. At home in the kitchen I'd comfortably house you; out here in the stable the cold wind comes in at every corner. (*Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,* pp. 46-7.)

and their appearance "surpassed romance in its fascinations." Though the Grey Friars afterwards turned aside from the straight and narrow path, nothing could altogether destroy the homely and wholesome impulse which they communicated to the Church, to Christianity, and to learning, or could ever dim the luster of St. Francis. By the fourteenth century, due to a variety of influences, the Franciscan not the least, English carols are well on the way. At first they are freely interlaced by Latin phrases and betray a clerical origin. This touch is very interesting and would tend, for the writers at least, to keep the new forms of praise linked with the old wellsprings of devotion. Nor would they be entirely meaningless to the people; for they were such as belonged to the stated forms of worship with which they were more or less familiar. In time, however, as English became quite adequate to voice the popular spiritual mood, the Latin lines decrease in number and eventually disappear. Then came the pure English carols —those "masterpieces of tantalizing simplicity."

That clerics were busy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England helping people to enter with spiritual joy into the meaning of Christmas is a matter of considerable interest. We are able

to form a fairly clear picture of one who lived to help on the movement. John Audelay of Haughmond Abbey, Shropshire, placed (c. 1430) over a collection of twenty-five Christmas carols this inscription in red letters:

> I pray yow syrus boothe moore and las
> syng these caroles in cristemas.

This group of carols was printed for the first time about twenty years ago.[28] Not much is known of Audelay, save what can be gleaned from his manuscript. He may have been a gay Goliard in his early days; but his writings show him in later life engrossed with more spiritual themes and laboring under acute distress of body and mind:

> As I lay seke in my langure
> In an abbay here be west,
> This boke I made with gret dolour,
> When I myght not slep ne haue no rest.

Though "deeff, seik, and blynd," as he described himself, he was yet able to make "this bok by goddus grace." Sir Edmund Chambers pictures him turning

[28] From MS Douce 302, preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, by E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, *Modern Language Review,* Vol. V. No. 4, October, 1910; Vol. VI. No. 1, January, 1911.

from a "tedious versifying of the whole duty of man" to Christmas carols and marking the change in the manuscript with the rubricated couplet already quoted. How the old priest expected "these caroles" to be used is not so clear; but probably "by wassailing neighbours," as has been suggested, "who made their rounds at Christmastide to drink a cup and bring good fortune on the house." Yet not all would be very suitable for this purpose. Some are severely ethical in tone, as much so as anything the author of *Piers Ploughman* wrote, or John Wycliffe. Others are deeply penitential. The last verse of XXV may be given; and it is not the only one in which composition proceeded with "teer of ye" by this pioneer of English Christmas Song:

> I pray youe seris par charyte
> redis this caral reuerently
> ffore I mad hit with wepyng eye
> your broder ion the blynd awdlay.

The brightest are those which sing the praises of the Virgin and the Child and the Christmas Saints. The four lines just quoted belong to a carol addressed to St. Francis. This is revealing. Though an inmate of an Augustinian Abbey he was devoted to the Umbrian Saint, that "sweet-voiced troubadour of the

Holy Spirit, the joculator Dei," whose joyous gospel wherever known and loved broke inevitably into happy Christmas song. It is not difficult to see what John Audelay was striving after. Like others, no doubt, whose names have been lost, he was trying on the one hand to redeem Christmas from its too pagan character, and on the other to import into it new strains of holy mirth. As people were wont on the return of Yuletide to eat and drink, sing and make merry, within and without the houses and halls; so he would have them hail the happy season, also sacred, with notes of religious rejoicing. He desired that through all the fleshly and material dress of the Festival there might shine "bright shoots of everlastingness." This was to be accomplished in part by providing spiritual songs modeled after the manner of secular ones. The new praise would not supplant but supplement outside the Church the Latin hymns and rites. To the plain-song melodies, more appropriate, doubtless, when eyes and hearts strained toward the place of the "tabernacle," would be added the more rollicking rhythms of folk song in which all could heartily share in their homes and in the open air. To this end labored John Audelay at the beginning of the fifteenth century

and not in vain. "Already," writes Sir Edmund Chambers, "the chanted question comes nearer and nearer along the crooked medieval street; and the clear voices peal out the exultant answer to the tingling stars":

What tythyngis bryngst us messangere
Of cristis borth this new eris day?

—Seche wonder tydyngus ye mow here,
That maydon & modur is won i fere,
And lady is of hye aray . . .
A babe is borne of hye natewre,
A prynce of pese that ever schal be,
Off heven & erthe he hath the cewre.
His lordchip is eternete,—
Seche wonder tythyngis ye may here . . .[24]

It is a far cry from John Audelay in the second quarter of the fifteenth century to the present day editors of *The Oxford Book of Carols,*[25] but the spirit in both is strikingly the same. In the Preface they pay tribute to "Francis of Assisi—that most Christian of saints, who as scenic artist at the Greccio

[24] *Tythyngis,* tidings. *I fere,* together, i.e. while a mother still a virgin. *Natewre,* nature. *Cewre,* cure, i.e. care of souls.

[25] Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw (Ox. Univ. Press, 1928). No lover of carols can afford to be without this book.

crib was the precursor if not the parent of the carol"; and to the Chantry Priest of Haughmond Abbey, who lived to encourage, if he did not institute, the practice of singing spiritual carols at Christmas time in England. They are avowedly the modern successors of both. From the fifteenth century onward the use of carols at the happy festival was held in the highest esteem by all classes of the people. In their way and place they would seem to have been as much enjoyed as the ballads. Not only did they grace the Christmas board in royal and academic circles; they also brightened the season "for the industrious maid and humble laborer." With the seventeenth century a change set in; and by the middle of the nineteenth the time honored custom had passed out almost completely. "There is no doubt," writes Miss Edith Rickert, "that Puritanism is to blame for the extinction of the practice of carol-singing, both in that it discouraged the excesses of Christmas revelry and in that it made but scant use of music as a means of religious experience. I doubt whether any good carols, either religious or secular, originated between the end of the seventeenth century and the middle of the nineteenth." [26] The passing away of the fine old English custom of men and women going out on

[26] *Ancient English Christmas Carols,* xxiif.

Christmas Eve to sing to people "Love and Joye, come to you," and of the beautiful Welsh practice of caroling to the music of the harp at the doors of houses, is a story which even a Puritan must read with some resentful sadness. Sixty years ago when William Henry Husk was editing his *Songs of the Nativity* he expressed the hope that carol singing in the best sense would yet revive. It is, happily, coming to its own once more. The time would seem to be ripe for a revival of the old Broadsheet, or something like it, which rendered such valuable service in days past. Never before in the history of this type of song has such rich provision been made for genuine caroling at the Christmas season. In the *Oxford Book of Carols* there is a choice collection, old, traditional and new, "clean and merry as the sunshine," and all set to unspeakably beautiful airs. The modern editors are anxious in our day, as John Audelay was in his, to add that brighter note to festive song characteristic of the carol. And in the tones of Robert Herrick, the last of the old English Carol writers:

> What sweeter music can we bring
> Than a carol, for to sing
> The birth of this our heavenly King?
> Awake the voice! Awake the string:

We see him come, and know him ours,
Who with his sunshine and his showers
Turns all the patient ground to flowers.

Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
And give the honour to this day,
That sees December turned to May,
If we may ask the reason, say:

The darling of the world is come,
And fit it is we find a room
To welcome him. The nobler part
Of all the house here is the heart:

Which we will give him, and bequeath
This holly and this ivy wreath,
To do him honour who's our King,
And Lord of all this revelling: [27]

[27] As arranged in the *Oxford Book of Carols*, pp. 246-7.

CHAPTER IV

ANCIENT ENGLISH CAROLS

FROM the days of John Audelay the English Christmas minstrels gathered strength; but who they might be it is seldom possible to tell. Now the carols suggest the hearty burgess life of medieval England; again the country where rustic people sang them "with rough accent, irregular time, and tunes learned by heart and not by book." Their authors were "not wholly of the folk, nor is the folk wholly forgotten" by them. The blossoming period belongs to the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries; though, of course, fine specimens can be found both before and after that time. Of the two hundred or more that lie before one, reference can only be made to some of the more representative types. For the purely secular kind, like the Norman French—*Seignors, ore entendez à nus* and its numerous lusty progeny, the present work cannot find room.

The general theme of the ancient English sacred carol is:

Mary is quene of allė thinge,
And her sone a lovely kinge . . .

Leve we all this werdly merthe,
And folwė we this joyful berthe.

The Holy Nativity, as the reader might now expect, is conceived in the most intimate manner. Not only is this so; but all those things with which the writers were familiar in their everyday life, bells and ships, birds and beasts, flowers and trees, homely domestic ways and forms of knighthood and royalty, are woven into their songs with no sense of irreverence. Though there is no justification in the Gospels for the presence of the ox and the ass at the manger in Bethlehem, they have an honored place in popular Nativity song from the very start. Sufficient warrant for their inclusion was found by rolling together two passages of Scripture in the Old Testament. Isaiah had said: "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib"; and Habakkuk had added: "In the midst of two beasts shalt thou be found." [1] So thoroughly have these creatures been worked into the Bethlehem picture that they could no more be dispensed with now than could the angels and the

[1] Isa. i. 3; Hab. iii. 2.

star, the shpherds and the kings; though hymn writers usually leave them out.

The sacred historians of the Christmas Gospel, while offering considerable detail in their narratives, are singularly reticent regarding both the time and the manner of the Incarnation. Pious theologians, however, long concerned themselves with the matter and were inclined to assign the Immaculate Conception to the *moment* of the Annunciation. The carols reflect their thought:

> To here cam Gabriel with light,
> And seid "Heil be thou, blissful wight."
>
> At that wurd that lady bright
> Anon conseived God full of might.

The favored one all medieval writers think of, to whom the heavenly ambassador came, bore no resemblance to the mature woman represented in the Catacombs, who is somewhere between forty and fifty years of age, but was "an angel-watered lily" still in her early teens:

> Fayr & fresch, as rose on thorn,
> Lely whyte clene with pur virginyte.

The carols which deal with the Annunciation are markedly restrained. They rarely deviate from the

letter of the Biblical story. Imagination is held firmly in check. Their obvious lack of originality is probably to be explained by an unwillingness on the part of humble clerics to venture upon a description of the holy mystery. The subject was clearly one to be taken up, if approached at all, in a spirit of profound reverence. Many figures had been suggested by the learned at different times. They speak of doves and *conceptio per aurem;* but for sheer beauty and effectiveness nothing can compare with the simile of the invisible dew falling gently on the place beneath. With this in mind an unknown writer in the middle of the fifteenth century composed this exquisite song:

I sing of a maiden
  That is makėles,
King of all kinges
  To her sone sche ches.
He cam also stille
  There his moder was,
As dew in Aprille
  That falleth on the grass.
He cam also stille
  To his moderės bour,
As dew in Aprille
  That falleth on the flour.
He cam also stille
  There his moder lay,

As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the spray.
Moder and maiden
Was never non but sche;
Well may swich a lady
Godès moder be.[2]

As in Sacred Art, so in the Carols, the Mother and the Child are seldom apart:

Two suns together
They ought to shinė bright.

But it is not usual for the writers to employ such lofty images as these to grace their song. When they would weave a garland of praise for each, or both, they resort with more interest and ease to the sweet blooms they knew and loved in the garden and around the countryside. The Mother is a rose, with all and more of the mystery of its blushing beauty and delicate fragrance.

Of a rose, a lovely rose,
Of a rose is all mine song . . .

For in this rose conteinėd was
Hevene and erthe in litel space,
Res miranda.[3]
(15th Cent.)

[2] *Makėles,* matchless, or without a mate. *Ches,* chose. *Also,* as. *Swich,* such.
[3] Wonderful Thing.

In one carol, inimitable in its charming simplicity, the Babe is a heraldic lily:

Singe we all, for time it is,
Mary hath born the flour-de-lyce.

For his love that bought us all dere,
Listen, lordinges that ben here,
And I will tell you in fere,[4]
Where of cam the flour-de-lyce.

On Cristmas night, whan it was cold,
Our Lady lay amonge bestes bolde,
And there she bare Jesu, Joseph tolde,
And there of cam the flour-de-lyce.

Singe we all, for time it is,
Mary hath born the flour-de-lyce.
(Before 1536)

But among the Audelay carols is found the most beautiful floral tribute to the Christ Child, reminding one of those Italian masterpieces in which the Holy Pair look out from a bower of flowers.

There is a floure sprung of a tree,
The rote thereof is called Jesse;
A floure of price,
There is none seche in Paradise!

[4] *In fere,* in company.

This flour is faire and fresche of heue;
Hit fadės never, bot ever is new;
The blissful branche this flour on grew
Was Mary mild that bare Jesu.
A flour of grace,
Ayains all sorow hit is solas!

Angeles there cam out of here toure
To loke apon this freschele floure,
Houe faire he was in his coloure,
And hou sote in his savoure,
And to behold
How soche a flour might spring in golde.

Of lilly, of rose of rise,
Of primrol, and of flour-de-lyse,
Of all the flours at my devise,
That floure of Jesse yet bers the pris,
As most of hele
To slake oure sorows every dele.

I pray youe flours of this cuntrė,
Where evere ye go, where ever ye be,
Hold hup the flour of good Jesse
Fore your freschenes and youre beutė,
As fairest of all,
And ever was, and ever schall.[5]

(c. 1426)

There is an unmistakable relationship between these old carols and the medieval religious drama.

[5] *Sote,* sweet. *Rise,* branch. *Hele,* health.

It is difficult to think of the one without calling up in the mind the other. The play season in England was during the summer, even when the subjects presented had to do with Christmas and Epiphany. It was then that the people saw the Nativity enacted in all its phases. That indelible pictures were left in the mind is suggested by the fact that many carol writers obviously composed their verses, not with the imagination of the Gospel scene of Bethlehem, but with the more vivid stage representations before the mind's eye. Commenting on the markedly objective and pictorial character of the carols, Sir Edmund Chambers writes:

> Those who sang them and those who listened had looked on 'Bethlem, that faier borow' and on 'Herowd, that mody king' and the 'three kinges of great noblay,' Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, marching in each one with his train. They could recall how Gabriel 'sat on knee, and seide *Ave!*' and how Mary 'stod stille as ony ston,' and how the 'angeles cam out of here toure' to behold, clustering no doubt upon a flight of steps.*

* *Early English Lyrics*, pp. 295-6.

But not only were the plays creative of carols, they required this kind of song to sustain their scenes. This is particularly true of the shepherd type. Reference may be made to one in the Townley Cycle, in which the reader would come across three carols glistening like diamonds in a dust heap. They are preceded by much foolish jesting; and to meet them is as if one passed suddenly from a pantomime into a service of worship in some cathedral. But this is the way of the medieval dramatist. On occasion he will say the most astounding things, provide for the coarsest wit and humor; but there are always places where the shoes come off, as in this instance: for once the shepherds are made to appear in the presence of the "Heavenly Babe" all buffoonery ceases and reverence chastens both thought and speech. A striking feature of these plays is the presentation of gifts to the "Babe" when the herdsmen "go to Bethlehem." No more than the Magi do they think of journeying thither empty handed. In this particular Townley play the presents taken, a bunch of cherries, a feathered songster and a tennis ball, are in no sense unique. The gifts are accompanied by a song from each of the shepherds; and he is not to be envied who cannot enjoy them:

Primus Pastor

Hail, comly and clene,
  Hail, yong child!
Hail, maker, as I meene,
  Of a maden so milde!
Thou has warėd, I weene,
  The warlo so wilde;
The fals giler of teen,
  Now goes he begilde.
    Lo! he merys,
Lo! he laghės, my sweting.
A welfare meting!
I have holden my heting.
    Have a bob of cherys!

Secundus Pastor

Hail, sufferan Savioure,
  For thou has us soght!
Hail, frely foyde and floure,
  That all thing has wroght!
Hail, full of favoure,
  That made all of noght!
Hail! I kneel and I cowre.
  A bird have I broght
    To my barne.
Hail, litel tinė mop!
Of oure crede thou art crop;
I wold drink on thy cop,
    Litel day starne.

Tertius Pastor

Hail, derling dere,
Full of godhede!
I pray thee be nere
When that I have nede.
Hail! Swete is thy chere;
My hart woldė blede
To see the sitt here
In so poorė wede,
With no pennys.
Hail! Put forth thy dall!
I bring thee bot a ball;
Have and play thee with all,
And go to the tenis! [7]

(c. 1450)

One can feel the charm of these choice carols, as one can appreciate the beauty of any other sweet lyric, without being able to express it in so many words. But Mr. Miles will carry many along with him when he says: "It lies in a curious incongruity—extreme homeliness joined to awe; the Infinite is contained within the narrowest human bounds; God Himself,

[7] *Wared,* worried, or cursed. *Warlo,* warlock, i.e. the devil. *Teen,* sorrow. *Merys,* is merry. *Heting,* promise. *Frely,* noble. *Foyde,* leaf. *Mop,* babe. *Cop,* cup. *Day starne,* day star. *Chere,* cheerful countenance. *Wede,* garb. *Dall,* hand. *Early English Lyrics,* pp. 124-5; see also *Townley Plays,* ed. by George England, Notes and Introduction by Alfred W. Pollard, pp. 710-36.

the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, a weak, helpless child. But a step more, and all would have been irreverence; as it is we have devotion, human, naïve, and touching." [8]

The lullabies are among the earliest carols to appear in England; and in many respects they are among the most human and appealing. Songs of this sort can be found in the fourteenth century; but they are extremely sad. One pictures a mother singing to her child who is weeping. Well may he cry, she croons, born as he is into this false and sorrowful world. One verse will suffice. Those who love phonetic spelling should encounter little difficulty:

Bestis and thos foules,
The fisses in the flode,
And euch schef alives
Mankid of bone and blode,
Whan hi commith to the world
Hi doth ham silf sum gode,
Al bot the wrech brol
That is of Adamis blode,
Lollai, lollai, litil child!
To kar ertow bemette;
Thou nost noght this woldis wild
Bifor the is isette.[9]

[8] *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,* p. 137.

[9] *Schef,* creature, or thing. *Brol,* imp, or child. *To kar ertow bemette,* with care art thou beset. *Nost noght,* knowest not.

The mood depicted is very unnatural and very unchristian. It is a vision of childhood and motherhood seen through the dripping mists of monastic pessimism. Nothing is apparent but a birth of dreary necessity into a dismal, hopeless world. It would be safe to say that the cleric who penned it had never learned to love St. Francis, had never drunk at the sweet springs of St. Bonaventura, or those that Chaucer found so refreshing. When the lullaby is caught up into Christmas song a new and brighter spirit pervades it:

I saw a sweet, a seemly sight,
A blissful burd, a blossom bright
That mourning made and mirth among:
A maiden mother, meek and mild
In cradle keep a knavë child
That softly slept; she sat and sung.
"Lullay, lulla lalow,
My bairn, sleep softly now."

(c. 1410)

Yet these songs never altogether lose a certain pensive strain. Thoughts of the cold, bare stable at Bethlehem, the prophecy of the aged Simeon regarding the sword that would pierce the mother's heart, and anticipations of the cruel cross and passion are woven together in a manner that make them quite unique in carol literature. Though the Blessed

Virgin is pictured cheering her Infant with baby talk, as any mother might do, it is with a profound difference. Here their authors are one with playwrights and painters. The old dramatist will represent Mary fondling her "swete sone" and saying, "Vowchesaffe that I might take the in mine armys"; but she also salutes Him as "my Lord God and prince of pees." In the great works of art the Madonna's caresses are characterized by a modest reserve and restraint. With her heavenly Babe she is portrayed as the embodiment of an ineffable dignity and a nameless humility. So in these lullabies the Holy Mother's playful words are accompanied by others expressive of the deepest reverence and awe:

> This lovely lady sat and song,
> And to her child con say,
> "My sone, my broder, my fader dere,
> Why liest thou thus in hay?
> My swetė brid, thus it is betid,
> Thogh thou be king veray;
> But nevertheless I will not cese
> To sing, By by, lullay." [10]
>
> (15th Cent.)

The lullabies are strongly dramatic and could be easily related to the plays. The three holy persons are made to discuss the hard surroundings of the

[10] *Veray,* true.

stable and forecast the sorrowful future. By means of these quaint conversations the writers expressed their deep sense of the mystery of the Incarnation. They were fascinated by the same wondrous fact that thrilled the imagination of St. Paul; [11] but they felt it in a far more intimate way than ever did the apostle. This feeling of wonder, it may be said, is the deepest note in the ancient carol of whatever kind. It is, indeed, the strain that runs like patterned gold threads through all Christmas poetry worthy of the name. It may appear in one form in the elegant fabrics of the early Latin hymn writers, in another in the rich poetic tapestries of Milton and Crashaw, and after yet another in the homespun stuff of medieval Nativity singers; but it is ever the same "marvellous thing," the utter humility of God at Bethlehem, that challenges faith and worship and compels the pen:

> Ay I wonder this in my mind,
> That He that all may loose and bind,
> Would be laid by beasts unkind.
> *This day.*
>
> (c. 1450)

The faith and piety in the ancient English carols of whatever kind are normally of the utmost sim-

[11] Phil. ii. 6-11.

plicity. They take in a wide territory of thought, beginning with Adam and ending with Doomsday. The writers often hark back to the first human pair; because Eden and Bethlehem were very closely linked together in medieval theology. This association of ideas was strengthened in the popular mind by the Paradise Plays which at one time were enacted at the Christmas season. It will, in fact, require an excerpt from a drama to present succinctly and aptly their oft hinted sense of the tragedy in the Garden. In the carols there is nothing so charmingly complete as this address of Eve; and who would not even prefer it to the lofty eloquence of the Miltonic mother of the race:

Alas, that ever that speche was spoken
That the fals aungel seid onto me!
Alas! oure maker's bidding is broken,
For I have touched his owen dere tree,
Oure flescly eyn bin all unloken;
Naked for sinne oureself we see;
That sory appel that we han soken
To dethe hathe brouth my spouse and me.[12]
(15th Cent.)

[12] J. O. Halliwell, *The Coventry Mysteries,* "The Fall of Man," pp. 27, 28. *Unloken,* unlocked, i.e. opened. *Soken,* sucked.

Interestingly enough, Adam is not always badly thought of; he was the author of good as well as evil. True:

all that ever of him came
The right way to hellė nam,[13]
Both Isaac and Abraham.

Yet if he had not partaken of the forbidden fruit, there would have been no Mother and Child and no Christmas! So:

Blessėd be the time
That appil takė was.
Therefore we moun singen
"Deo gracias." [14]
(15th Cent.)

In some of the very early carols a deep sense of personal sin is present. In one there is the prayer: "Yef me grace to see thi face *Infantis"*; but the vapors of penitence obscure the vision:

Mi thounc is wilde as is the ro
Luto gratulante.
Ho werchet me ful muchel wo
Illaque favente.
Bote yef he wole wende me fro.

[13] *Nam,* took.
[14] *Moun,* may. *Deo gracias,* Thanks to God.

Ic wene myn herte breket a two
Fervore.
Ic am ifaiht bo day ant naiht
Dolore . . .[15]

This clerical piece belongs to the thirteenth century. The spiritual sun of Christmas is rising over England; but it is still early morn. In the fifteenth century the note of praise is uppermost. Now the writers pipe their artless notes, not as sin-sick mortals, but as those who would greet the Nativity with a cheer:

Can I not sing but "Hoy,"
Whan the Joly shepard made so much joy?

In reflective moments the spiritual significance of the Incarnation is considered. Then, as if there lay before the mind the spectacle of mist wreaths in a valley melting before the rising sun, it is regarded as having dispelled in the most marvelously magical manner the Satanic darkness and damnation which had hung over the human race since the eviction of Adam and Eve from the garden of innocence:

[15] *Thounc,* thought. *Ifaiht,* tamed. Translation of Latin lines in order—delighting in filth, by her favor, with raging, with sorrow.

It was derk, it was dim,
For men that levėd in gret sin;
Lucifer was us all within,
Till on the Cristmes day.

There was weping, there was wo,
For every man to hell gan go,
It was litel mery tho,
Till on the Cristmes day.
(15th Cent.)

To believe in "cristen lay," [16] which tells how all this has come to pass is to enter into the meaning and joy of Christmas. The English medieval carols are not, it must be admitted, strongly mystical. These profound thoughts of Angelus Silesius might not be easy to match:

Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
And not within thyself, thy soul will be forlorn;
The Cross on Golgotha thou lookest to in vain,
Unless within thyself it be set up again.

The Incarnation is not commonly realized by the old English carolers with deep individual feeling. It is viewed, quaint language aside, as a great Divine Event, a loving act of God, luminously objective and blessingful to all mankind, to be rejoiced in hand in

[16] *Lay,* creed.

hand as people were wont to sing "Sumer is icumin in."

Christo paremus cantica,
In excelsis gloria.[17]

When Crist was born of Mary free
In Bedlem in that faire citė,
Angelles song ever with mirth and glee
In excelsis gloria.

Herdmen beheld thes angelles bright
To hem apperėd with gret light,
And seid 'Goddes sone is born this night.'
In excelsis gloria.

This king is comen to save kinde,
In the scriptur as we finde;
Therefore this song have we in minde,
In excelsis gloria.

(c. 1500)

And after all it is only the Faith held in common, the Faith that is strongly and brightly "supernatural," that recognizes the "givenness" of Christianity, which stirs the soul to hearty praise; whereas one that is too personal, too subjective, too self-conscious and barely transcends the human plane, soars lamely on the wings of any *Jubilate Deo* or *Te Deum laudamus.*

[17] Let us prepare a song to Christ, Glory in the Highest.

This, of course, is not to suggest that the genuine mystic ever loses himself in himself; he loses himself to find himself in God, whose splendor shines aloft, yet burns at the center of his soul. Still that deepest of all motives to the mystic, the daily enjoyment of the divine for its own sake, is by no means absent in these old carols, any more than it is in the piety of medieval times; only from this soil flowers of Christmas song did not spring up plenteously. John Audelay, however, in a carol fragrant with pure devotion, a carol whose spirit links him at once with St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Heinrich Suso, Richard Rolle of Hampole and Juliana of Norwich, can sing with restrained rapture of an ineffable Presence here and now:

> I haue a loue is heuen kyng
> I loue his loue fore euer more . . .
> ffor he me louyd or I him knew
> þer fore I loue him al þer best
> Ellis my loue I myȝt hit new
> I loue with him to take my rest
> I say here fore.[18]

But in the main the old English carols are group, not personal, songs. In a simple way they chant in happy

[18] *Audelay Carols,* U-V. þ-th. ȝ-gh. XXIII.

strains the common feelings concerning the wondrous Birth; and "salvation," if not a present joy, is, at least, a fond future hope. The writers look up reverently to Jesus and crave that "He bring us allė to good end":

> Now pray we to that heavenly King,
> To send us all His dear blessing,
> Shrift and housel at our ending.

And again:

> Blessėd brother, graunte us grace,
> A domes day to see thy face,
> And in thy court to have a place,
> That we mow there singė nowel.
> *Nowel, nowel, nowel, nowel, nowel, nowel!*

CHAPTER V

THE COLOR OF CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS in church and home, even in our prosaic and mechanical age, is almost inconceivable without the presence of the delightful evergreens. If their use at such a time did not possess the sanction of high antiquity, it would be sufficiently recommended by its own inherent beauty. But this is one of the happy contributions which paganism made to the Christian festival. The graceful custom has its roots in the profound reverence of the ancients for all natural phenomena. To their simple and unartificial minds Nature was everywhere alive. Every fountain had its spirit, every mountain its deity and every water, grove and meadow its supernatural associations. The whisperings of the trees through their leafy boughs was the subtle speech of the god who dwelt within, while the sound of the waves breaking over the pebbly beach was the joyous laughter of the divinities of the sea. The development is long and slow from this nascent open-eyed wonder to the mature doctrine of

the Divine Imminence, of which Christmas is the great festival; but the one is the root and the other is the perfect blossom.

Many suggestions have been made as to the original purpose of bringing sylvan sprays into the houses at the time of winter festivities. One thing is certain they were never sought merely for their decorative capabilities, as is apt to be the case now. Among the Romans it was customary at the Kalends of January to present people with green branches for the sake of good luck in the New Year. Some suggest that here is the clue to the meaning of the custom. But it would be far nearer the truth to think of the garlands in a sacramental way, as carrying with them a blessing into the home. And who would care to deny that they still do? It is only another, and a prettier form, of the same idea to say that they were carried within doors so that the woodland spirits, shivering in the cold and sleety trees, might be induced to come with them, add to, and share in, the festive joys of the time. And, of course, they came, just as the jovial spirit and the friendly spirit come now when the mystic boughs are conveyed over the threshold. Nor do they come until that is done. What would Yuletide be even now without them?

It could not be at all, save in imagination. Our forbears realized this; for fetching the hallowed sprigs from the woods they charmingly described as "bringing home Christmas."

At first the Church frowned upon this intrusion of paganism into the sacred season. This was not due to any antipathy to the natural emblems in themselves, but on account of the superstitious sentiments which were bound up with them. But so far as the sanctuaries were concerned it was almost inevitable that in time it should be recorded with approval "*Templa exornantur,*" Churches are decked. There was ample Scriptural warrant for the practice. Isaiah who had supplied so many stirring words for the Advent Offices had also written: "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary." [1] Altogether the ancient Church was wisely tolerant in her attitude to heathen ideas and customs. She recognized that many of them, like adorning houses with evergreens, were endeared to the people by immemorial usage; so instead of banning them she more often permitted their continuance, directing her efforts toward investing them

[1] Isa. lx. 13.

with a new sanctity and meaning. While they were often made to represent higher and holier things, the older notions were not always discarded; hence the curious and interesting mixture of ideas, pagan and Christian, which became charmingly entwisted with the greenery of the season. The plants which, more than any others, entwined themselves about the festival, like vines clinging to some old mansion or cottage, are holly, ivy, mistletoe and rosemary.

In some old Christmas songs holly and ivy are linked together and sometimes appear in strange antagonism to each other. Holly is the man's plant, while ivy is the woman's. The poems carry on a kind of debate as to which shall have the preëminence. The root idea is whether the master or the mistress shall rule the household, a topic of perennial interest. In medieval times these songs must have been popular; for they exist in a variety of forms, which is the unfailing mark of wide esteem. The following version is vigorously pagan, and symbolizes that jolly sportive opposition of the sexes which runs back into ancient folk festival:

Holver and Heivy made a grete party,
Who schuld have the maistry
In londės where they go.

Than spak Holver 'I am frece and joly;
I will have the maistry
In londès where we go.'

Than spak Heivy 'I am loud and proud;
And I will have the maistry
In londès where we go.'

Than spak Holver, and set him downe on his knee,
"I pray thee, jentil Heivy,
Sey me no veleny
In londès where we go." [2]

(15th Cent.)

No pious hand evidently tried to convert this piece into a "gude and godlie ballat"; indeed the theme could offer little promise of ever being made to serve the interests of a comely grace! Under the influence of Christian thought and sentiment, holly, with all its festive significance, became very sacred. On the other hand, ivy, unable to break away from its Bacchanalian background, remained for a longer time on the pagan level and even found its way into coarse jesting, which it were not polite to recount. In Italy, however, it was greatly dignified by an association with the Madonna and her Child. But this was the pretty ground ivy (*nepeta glechoma*), "whose

[2] *Frece,* fresh, quick.

patches of perfumed heart-shaped leaves were once thought to mark *'que Dieu marcha,'* where God has walked." [3] To northern peoples the holly was the type of the Burning Bush, and so a symbol of the chaste Maiden, chosen to be the Mother of Christ, whose being glowed with the sacred fire of the Holy Spirit. The holly was indeed sacrosanct, and never to be otherwise regarded; for says the old ballad:

> Who so ever ageinst holly do crie,
> In a lepe shall he hang full hie.
> Who so ever ageinst holly do sing,
> He maye wepe and handës wring.[4]
>
> (15th Cent.)

But the tree had bright red berries shining out from dark spiny leaves of burnished green; and these spoke of the blood drops which the cruel crown of thorns drew from the Savior's brow, as once they had been the blood drops of the beautiful Balder, the ill-fated darling of Valhalla. Eventually holly and ivy, "now both well grown," sing hand in hand happy Christmas songs, but still "the holly bears the crown." The holly wreathes of to-day with their star of light in the center symbolize at once the Joyful

[3] Alfred E. P. Raymund Dowling, *The Flora of the Sacred Nativity*, p. 203.

[4] *Lepe*, basket or rope.

Mysteries of the Incarnation and the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Cross and Passion, which were always linked together in medieval thought.

The mistletoe is, perhaps, the fullest of all of romance. The very mention of the word carries the mind back into the dim and distant past. Among the ancient Britons its annual cutting was an occasion of great solemnity and importance. It took place about the middle of what we now call November. A stately procession, led by the priests, was made to the woods. When the chosen oak was reached the Arch-Druid, robed in white and armed with a golden sickle, ascended the tree and cut the sacred vine. As it fell it was caught in a fair cloth, outstretched for the purpose by immaculate maidens. The ceremony was accompanied by sacrifices to the gods and followed appropriately by festivities. Before the people dispersed the mistletoe was divided into small portions and distributed among them. The precious sprigs were carried home and hung over the doors of their dwellings, because the protective and curative virtues of the plant were believed to be endless. It bore the name of *all-heal* and *guidhel.*

In Scandinavian mythology the mistletoe is implicated in the treacherous death of Balder, "the whitest

and most beloved of all the gods." His one and only enemy was the wicked spirit Loki. Balder, having a presentiment of death, confided in his mother Freyja. In her anxiety for his safety she exacted an oath from all created things that they should do him no harm; but she inadvertently overlooked the mistletoe. Loki learned of this exception; and by means of a dart made from the fateful parasite accomplished Balder's destruction, through the instrumentality of his twin brother Hoder, the blind god of war.

> So on the floor lay Balder dead . . .
> In his breast stood fixt the fatal bough
> Of mistletoe, which Lok the Accuser gave
> To Hoder, and unwitting Hoder threw:
> 'Gainst that alone had Balder's life no charm.[5]

This is probably the reason why Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus* makes Tamora, Queen of the Goths, call it the "baleful mistletoe." But according to the legend it was afterwards redeemed by Freyja. In her transforming hands the accursed thing, like the Cross itself, lost all its hateful and grievous associations. Out of sorrow she brought victory, out of hatred and discord friendship and love. It could not have been difficult to start this vine creeping up the tree of

[5] Matthew Arnold, *Balder Dead.*

Christmas. The symbol of affectionate joy and peace passed quite naturally into the festival of amity and good will. But a comparatively modern tradition, reinforced by Washington Irving and many others, has diffused the impression that while mistletoe is eminently proper at happy family gatherings, it would be "awfully wicked" to take it into a church. This is now everywhere the common belief. The reason for it, it may be suggested, is not to be found in the Druidical and legendary background so much, as in a disposition to equate the arrow that proved fatal to Balder and the far-famed dart of Cupid. At all events, the hymeneal quest has for some considerable time been the most important, if not the exclusive, element in the mysticism of the mistletoe. The songs, however, which celebrate this phase of the matter are all quite recent; and to be sure they are gay and jolly enough. What might not Robert Burns have done with the theme had he lived south of the Border? Here are two snatches of one that might have been inspired by *Duncan Gray:*

Of all the nights within the year,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
That's the night to lovers dear,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

When blushing lips, that smile at folly,
As red as berries on the holly,
Kiss, and banish melancholy.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Mary tripped with panting breath,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Till the magic bough beneath,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Then she feigned undone her shoe,
But the swain her mischief knew,
And seized a kiss—it might be two.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

(Temp. 1835)

But this kissing ceremony was never complete, the wise aver, unless a pearly berry were presented to the maiden as a token of good luck; and when they were all plucked the privilege ceased. Yet it is quite possible that this mode of saluting under the mistletoe may be a "naughty child" of the *pax vobiscum,* the kiss of peace,[6] which was practiced in the ancient Church, and still is in some places, in token of the divine embrace of man in Christ, which made of believers one loving household of faith. At any rate, John Gay, walking the streets of London over two hundred years ago, knew nothing of the exclusion of the vine from the sanctuary:

[6] Rom. xvi. 16.

Christmas! the joyous period of the year.
Now with bright Holly all your temples strow,
With Laurel green and sacred Mistletoe.[7]

There is much to indicate that the supposed ecclesiastical taboo was, at least, not universal in the Middle Ages; and very likely it did not exist at all. Mr. Raymund Dowling calls attention to old Church accounts "which show entries of payment for mistletoe" [8] for the purpose of Church decoration at Christmas. In York Minster in medieval times there obtained a most interesting mistletoe ceremony at the Nativity Festival. A bough of it, gleaming berries and all, was carried by the clergy and placed upon the high altar as a prelude to proclaiming "a public liberty, pardon and freedom to all sorts of inferior and even wicked people at the gates of the city to the four corners of the earth." This, it may be suspected, proved the plant's spiritual undoing; for it is not difficult to imagine how this generous attitude to "divers losels and wastrels" might scandalize the godly in the land. There were those who would sooner have burned such offenders than blessed them. But with all its dangers the amnesty had more affinities with the Christmas spirit than the iron

[7] *Trivia,* ll. 440-2. [8] *Op. cit.,* p. 121.

temper of extremer types of Puritans. It is surprising that clerics who love old modes of thought have not made something of the sacred mistletoe. By means of a touch drawn from the *amende honorable* pronounced by the Bishop in *Notre-Dame* in Paris on New Year's Eve, and another from the old York Minster declaration of forgiveness, an effective Church rite might be created for Christmas, a kind of Parish *Pax.* The Mistletoe, the *all-heal* of the ancients, could symbolize the *guidhel* of the Gospel of Incarnate Grace, in which all heart-burnings and every root of bitterness might be swallowed up in a new appreciation and experience of Heaven's will to harmony and peace.

But what has become of the romantic rosemary? This was once the choicest of the Christmas decorations. According to the popular tradition it made its way into England during the first half of the fourteenth century, sent, it would seem, by the Countess of Hainault "to hir dougter Philip the quene of England," who had married Edward the Third in 1328. Accompanying the precious gift was a Latin treatise setting forth its wonderful virtues, which when "translated into vulgar ynglysch worde for werde as

fonde in latyn," by "danyll bain" at the beginning of the fifteenth century began to captivate all hearts. There is little wonder that this herb of pleasant savor was accorded a high place among the Christmas evergreens; for there was no point in the drama of life that it did not hallow. In the sixteenth century and later it could be seen in almost every woman's garden; and it was grown in great abundance. Gray-green branches were cut from the hedgerows and when hung around the rooms, or strewn on the floors, presented a pleasing contrast to the more somber greens of the holly and ivy. But it was not by its color that rosemary found its way into the season. It was its insinuating perfume that placed it there; and because, in the words of Sir Thomas More who loved it dearly, " 'tis the herb sacred to remembrance and therefore to friendship, whence a sprig of it hath a dumb language." In days past people knew, though they had no psychology to explain it, that scent, far more than sight or sound, was mysteriously linked with the powers of memory. An agreeable odor will release in the mind long forgotten trains of thought as nothing else will. "Sweet scents," says Walter Savage Landor finely,

Are the swift vehicles of still sweeter thoughts
And nurse and mellow the dull memory
That would let drop without them her best stores.
They bring me tales of Youth and tones of love.*

So beside the beautiful, but scentless, holly and ivy hung the fragrant and "memory-evoking" rosemary. The choice was instinctive, but happy; and it made a contribution to the atmosphere of the season more subtle than all the rest. Pious imagination long played around it and wove pretty legends. It was believed that all its aromatic qualities were acquired when upon it the swaddling clothes of the Infant Savior had been hung to dry. The flowers are of a deep lavender hue; but according to Spanish folklore they were originally white. The change in color took place in honor of the Virgin, when, during the flight into Egypt, she cast her purple robe over a rosemary bush, while resting with Joseph and the Babe by the way. Though the bloom comes in May in England, it was long thought to coincide with the Passion of the Lord in Holy Week. As late as the close of the eighteenth century the choir boys of Ripon Cathedral came into the church on Christmas morning with baskets of rosy apples all stuck with springs of rose-

* *Canterbury Poets,* Selections, p. 185.

mary. Like the festival itself this custom had a material and a spiritual side. The choristers received thereby their Christmas pennies, or more, as the rank of the donor might dictate; while the fruit and the green sprig symbolized, respectively, fallen man and his redemption by the Second Adam. It is a good deal of a mystery why rosemary was allowed to drop completely out of Christmas; for by many tender ties it seemed to be inseparably bound up with it. But it has gone. It fell by the wayside in Victorian times, with a distinct loss to the sentiment of the season. Since, however, it is not unknown in this land it might be restored. Christmas would benefit by it; for, perhaps, more than ever it is the festival of reunion and remembrance. Who would not join with Nicholas Breton in saying: "I hold it a memory of the Heaven's love and the world's peace, the mirth of the honest, and the meeting of the friendly." [10]

The Christmas decorations in old England were frequently removed after Epiphany, January 6, or on the following Monday, called Plough Monday. In some parts they were kept up till Candlemass, Feb-

[10] From *A Bower of Delights* by Alexander B. Grosart, p. 165.

ruary 2. This is the time Robert Herrick had in mind when he penned these instructions:

> Down with the rosemary, and so
> Down with the bays and mistletoe,
> Down with the holly, ivy, all
> Wherewith ye deck'd the Christmas hall;
> That so the superstitious find
> No one least branch there left behind:
> For look! how many leaves there be
> Neglected there, Maids, trust to me,
> So many goblins you shall see.
>
> (c. 1650)

The sanctity of the evergreens is nowhere more clearly shown than in the manner of their disposal. They were not to be thrown out. The holly might be burned or given to the cattle; but the mistletoe bough was carefully preserved till the time came for a new one next year. Not at the close of a chapter could one begin to speak concerning "ye vertuys of rosmaryn"; but it were surely wicked to withhold these precious recipes from an ancient English Herbal printed in London "a lytel fro ye Stockes in ye Pultry/ ye XXV day of Marche. The yere of our Lord MCCCCC & XXV":

> Take the flowers thereof and make powder thereof and binde it to thy right arme in a linnen cloath and it shale make thee light and merrie.

Also put the leaves under thy bedde and thou shalt be delivered of all evill dreams.

Boyle the leaves in white wine and washe thy face therewith and thy browes and thou shalt have a fair face.

Also if thou be feeble boyle the leaves in cleane water and washe thyself and thou shalt wax shiny.

(Moreover—priceless gift—it held within itself the secret of youth.)

Take the Timber thereof and burn it to coales and make powder thereof. . . . Smell it oft and it shall keep thee youngly.

Make thee a box of the wood of rosemary and smell to it and it shall preserve thy youth.[11]

In certain parts of England the women folk removed the greenery only to put in their place snowdrops—those harbingers of spring that came before either daffodils or swallows dared to appear.

[11] G. Clark Nuttall, *The Nineteenth Century,* "Rosemary at Christmas," December, 1925.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE YULE LOG GLOW

CHRISTMAS Eve was the most hallowed night in all the Church year. In Hamlet, Shakespeare alludes to its great sanctity, and indeed to the whole season, which was then twelve nights long. Marcellus declares:

> Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
> The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
> And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad;
> The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

Horatio replies:

> So have I heard and do in part believe it.[1]

Some, however, have been at a loss to know where the great dramatist could have gotten this idea; for such were the weird beings that roamed at large during this season of darkness, moaning winds and

[1] Act I, Sc. i, ll. 158-65.

howling tempests, that nights were to many far from wholesome. To our forbears, elfins, goblins, ghosts, dragons and other sinister and nameless beings were very real. St. Paul in his *Epistles* and Robert Burns in his *Tam O'Shanter* show a like familiarity with the demons of darkness. At all times, especially at Christmas, they delighted by their mischievous pranks in disturbing the peace and happiness of mankind. With all this in view Shakespeare's lines have little justification; but when a glance is cast in the direction of Christian thought and sentiment they do not appear at all unnatural. At the moment of the Savior's birth it was fondly believed a great calm ensued, as if Nature paused in reverent adoration. Milton, in his magnificent "Hymn to the Nativity," alludes to this universal tranquillity:

But peaceful was the night,
Wherein the Prince of light
  His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The winds with wonder whist
Smoothly the water kist
  Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave.

And when at the hour of midnight the Babe was born celestial music was conceived to break forth

from the skies, while all Nature joined in the spirit of celebration. Even the animals were given a voice suitable to the time. A beautiful old English Broadsheet pictures the Holy Family on the night of the Nativity surrounded by angels and shepherds, and also by other peculiarly interesting attendants. A woman is depicted carrying a basket of fruit on her head. Close by is a man with a pair of bagpipes. But the most curious touch of all appears in connection with certain birds and beasts which are shown with Latin inscriptions coming from their mouths. The cock crows *Christus natus est* (Christ is born). The raven inquires *Quando* (When)? The crow replies *Hac nocte* (This night). An ox moos *Ubi* (Where)? and a lamb in the foreground bleats out *Bethlehem.* In a kneeling posture a group of angels gaze upon the Infant, while a voice from above sings *Gloria in excelsis* (Glory be on high). Encircling the picture is an explanatory verse, half of which runs: "Here's a Wonder never knowne, a King a Manger makes his Throne." [1a] All these sentiments variously expressed in Scripture, Milton and the old Carol Sheet, belong to the very essence of poetry. Poets have always sought and found in Nature a sense of

[1a] See Frontispiece.

correspondence with their own feelings. As on the first Sacred Night, so on every recurring Christmas Eve. In Christian thought at its best there seemed no place for aught else but rejoicing. The cattle in their stalls, the farmers of old verily believed, fell down on their knees in homage to the new born King; while husbandmen declared that the hybernating bees awoke from their winter slumbers to hum their canticle of praise; but this was only heard by the pure in heart. These are but so many naive expressions of the common belief in the wonderful sanctity of Christmas Eve. Many would have little difficulty in descending from these fancies of poetry to the facts of prose. The coming of Christ into the world, it would be shown, did mean the consecration of the whole universe, the cleansing of the human imagination and the eventual end of all supernatural enemies. The tormentors lingered long, it is true, and they have not all disappeared yet; but to those who hold the faith of the Incarnation the air and the heavens have been washed of a hundred abominations. "There is no other religion," writes T. R. Glover, "with anything like the bright atmosphere of love that the Incarnation makes. The terrors go like the night-fears of children when the

room is flooded with light, and one they love stands by them." [2] The Christmas Gospel is Immanuel, God with us, in all and over all, blessed for evermore.

But it is high time to put the lighted taper to the Yule Log. No little of the charm of Christmas lies in the fact that it belongs to the season of frost and snow. Transplanted to another time of the year, or into another clime which knows not the icy blasts of Boreas, it would be something altogether different. Thrice happy is the home, however humble, that possesses an open hearth. This is the very soul of the house and nothing can ever be made to take its place. A radiator is extremely effective in our cold climate; but it is utterly devoid of poetry; while the gas log, that blazing block of utility, knows not even the name of romance. It was not beside either that James Russell Lowell was moved to write:

> O thou of home and guardian Lar!
> What warm protection dost thou bend
> Round curtained talk of friend with friend,
> While the gray snow-storm, held aloof,
> To softest outline rounds the roof,
> Or the rude North with baffled strain
> Shoulders the frost-starred window-pane! [3]

[2] *The Christian Tradition and Its Verification,* p. 152.
[3] *A Winter Evening Hymn to My Fire.*

Once a number of friends seated around the fireside fell to discussing what after all was the crowning glory of Christmas. Many and varied were the views expressed. Some declared in favor of the "flowing bowl." Others leaned toward the more substantial wares of the table, mince pie, plum pudding, roast beef, turkey and the like. One maiden lady, somewhat timidly, announced her preference for the bewitching mistletoe! But when all opinions were sifted and weighed it was found that the place of supreme importance was accorded to the Christmas fire. This was pronounced the burning heart of the season, the living symbol of all the warm emotions and bright thoughts appropriate to the time and the one amalgamator of age and sex. Tastes might vary concerning matters of food; but who is there who can gainsay a fire? Even to-day, from the domestic point of view, Christmas is as much as ever the time for family gatherings around the old fireside.

Certain it is that the gleaming hearth was the center of social gravity to our ancestors in days past. Many of the old customs associated with the burning of the Yule Log have passed away; but it is pleasant to recall some of them, for they are both interesting and meaningful. The kind of wood used

varied a good deal in different parts of Europe and even in the same country; but as a rule it consisted of oak, pine, ash, or olive. In Scotland the birch was the popular wood. But for some reason the log was stripped of its bark; whence the proverb descriptive of the person devoid of this world's gear, "He's as bare as the birk at Yule." Not infrequently it was the rugged root of one of these trees, and the more fantastically shaped it was, the better. As to size it was consistent with the capacity of the fireplace, which was always ample. The bringing in of the Yule Log was everywhere a joyous occasion, accompanied with much fun and frolic, especially among the younger members of the family. Clement A. Miles, drawing upon the *Memoirs of Frédéric Mistral* (b. 1830), affords us a picture of how it was done in the boyhood days of this Provençal poet. The account will show an interesting mixture of pagan and Christian sentiment.

Walking in line we bore it home, headed by the oldest at one end, and I the last born, bringing up the rear. Three times we made the tour of the kitchen, then, arrived at the flagstones of the hearth, my father solemnly poured over the log a glass of wine, with the dedicatory words:

"Joy, joy. May God shower joy upon us, my dear

children. Christmas brings us all good things. God give us grace to see the New Year, and if we do not increase in numbers may we at all events not decrease."

In chorus we responded:

"Joy, joy, joy!" and lifted the log on the fire dogs. Then as the first flame leapt up my father would cross himself, saying, "Burn the log, O fire," and with that we all sat down to the table.[4]

In England the ceremonies were quite pagan, but none the less delightful on that account. The poet Herrick tells us all about them, and even descends into many niceties of detail. The approach of the Christmas block was hailed with music and general rejoicing:

Come, bring with a noise,
My merrie merrie boyes,
The Christmas Log to the firing . . .

On your Psaltries play,
That sweet luck may
Come while the Log is a teending.

When placed in the hearth it could only be lighted with a last year's brand; and this office required clean hands:

Wash your hands, or else the fire
Will not teend to your desire;

[4] *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,* p. 255.

Unwasht hands, ye Maidens, know,
Dead the Fire, though ye blow.[5]
(c. 1650)

It was intended that the Log should keep smoldering through the twelve days of Christmas; and so be easily blown into flame, as occasion might require, by the aid of a pair of bellows.

In certain parts of England it was an ashen fagot that was used, and the accompanying merriment assumed a form all its own. The single block of wood, or it might be a number of sticks, were bound, or hooped, with strips of the same tree, or the hazel, and the number was seven, or nine. The strips were carefully prepared in different degrees of size and strength. The barrel-like log was then laid in the spacious reredos and was soon ablaze. The bands were the first to be attacked by the flames, and as each snapped with a loud report, the master of the house was expected to furnish a fresh bowl of cider:

The pond'rous ashen-fagot, from the yard,
The jolly farmer to his crowded hall
Conveys with speed; where, on the rising flames
(Already fed with store of massy brands)

[5] *Ceremonies for Christmas.*

It blazes soon; nine bandages it bears;
And as they each disjoin (so custom wills),
A mighty jug of sparkling cyder's brought,
With brandy mixed, to elevate the guests.

The matrimonial element, too, had a place in these ceremonies. The rings were often associated with pairs of lovers; and the order in which they surrendered to the flames announced the sequence of their weddings to the great excitement of all concerned. The particular choice of an ashen fagot is variously explained. According to one legend it was by an ash wood fire that the Christ Child was first washed and dressed at Bethlehem. Having thus cheered and brightened the original Holy Night, it was only proper that it should ever after be used to warm and lighten the hearth on Christmas Eve.

It would take long to tell of all that was enjoyed while the Yule log flickered on the hearth, not only on Christmas Eve, but throughout the whole Season to Epiphany. Bores and wallflowers were not welcome anywhere:

Make we mery bothe more and lasse,
For now is the time of Cristèmas!

Lett no man cum into this hall,
Grome, page, nor yet marshall,
But that sum sport he bring with all;
For now is the time of Cristėmas!

If that he say he can not sing,
Some oder sport then lett him bring,
That it may please at this festing;
For now is the time of Cristėmas!

If he say he can nought do,
Then for my love aske him no mo,
But to the stokkes then let him go;
For now is the time of Cristėmas! [5a]

(Before 1536)

In old England Christmas was indeed happy, hilariously merry. It was, of course, no new thing in human experience for feast and frolic to be conjoined with religious rejoicing; but seldom have they had so congenial an association as among the English in Plantagenet and Tudor times. All through the Middle Ages the two rivers of riot and religion, from

[5a] *Stokkes.* "The Lord of Misrule at Christmas kept stocks, like the Earl of Gloucester in *King Lear* or any other lord, and exercised his festival jurisdiction by condemning to them offenders against the amenities of the revel." *Early English Lyrics,* p. 373 and *Mediæval Stage,* Vol. I, pp. 406, 408, 410.)

which many, high and low, rich and poor, contrived to drink deeply at Christmas, flowed together till they were parted at the Reformation. In the Puritan Era the former ran underground. At the Restoration of Charles II it reappeared and was hailed with joy and acclamation. Alas! it was no longer the mountain torrent of roaring cataracts and sparkling cascades, but a comparatively prosaic stream wending its sluggish way through fen country, until weired up by Dickens and made to tumble merrily once more in the sunlight of his genius.

It is curious that many of the old Christmas games which enlivened the time are now mere names. Antiquarians look with inquisitive eyes at these intriguing words—Feed the Dove, Rowland Bo, Shoeing the Wild Mare, Steal the White Loaf, the Parson has lost his Cloak, and have not the remotest idea what they mean. But even if they did they might not appeal, like Hot Cockles, to this age of ours, less interested in entertaining itself than in being entertained. Yet the reader can decide. Hot Cockles was not only a favorite gambol in old time Christmas, but a game of great antiquity. It was evidently popular with the ancient Egyptians, as representations on

their tombs suggest; and writers have loved to depict the shepherds in Arcady delighting in this disport. Imagine a large room and a goodly number of guests assembled. One person, blindfolded, and in a kneeling posture, puts his head in the lap of another sitting on a stool or chair. Placing his hand on his back, palm upwards, he cries, "Hot cockles, hot!" It was then the privilege of each player to strike the open hand; and if the kneeling one guessed right, the striker took his place, if not a forfeit might be exacted. The sentiments provoked varied a good deal according to the nature and force of the impact. One man, seemingly much distressed by a particular slap which he received, appealed to Mr. Spectator (1711) and said: "I am a footman in a great family and am in love with the housemaid. We were all at hot-cockles last night in the hall these holidays, when I lay down and was blinded she pulled off her shoe and hit me with the heel such a rap as almost broke my head to pieces. Pray, Sir, was this love or spite?" What comforting word reached him by way of reply is not stated. He, unfortunate man, hoped, no doubt, to be able to say like Cuddy in one of John Gay's poems, belonging to about the same year:

As at hot-cockles once I laid me down
I felt the weighty hand of many a clown.
Buxoma gave a gentle tap and I
Quick rose and read soft mischief in her eye.[6]

During the eighteenth century, however "among persons of distinction," there would seem to have been as little enthusiasm about Christmas as about religion itself. It is not infrequently referred to as a rather dreary day, almost the acme of insipidity, a day to be thankful for—when over. A Christmas game appropriate to this mood was called "yawning for a Cheshire cheese." Near the hour of midnight, when all were beginning to succumb to the seductions of the sandman, the languid sport commenced. Whoso yawned the widest and the longest, "and at the same time so naturally as to produce the most yawns in the spectators, was pronounced the victor and carried home the cheese as his reward!"

But the Yule Log had other meanings than those associated with the Wassail Bowl, omens of matrimony, feast and frolic. Its light was sacramental. People loved to see the firelight dance on the roof and walls and would even bring their pewter, and also silver, if they were fortunate to possess any,

[6] *Shepherds Week, Monday,* ll. 99-103.

within the orbit of its gleaming grace. Of what ancient pagan sacrament or belief was this the pleasant survival? For long the wood fire was the only form of illumination in the homes. The candles appeared much later and though prettier could never mean any more than the glowing flames of the immemorial block on the family hearth. The practice of placing burning candles in the windows on Christmas Eve is a continuation of an Irish custom, bound up with the thought of the Christ Child out alone in the cold and dark and requiring to be lighted on His way. What charm this had on a desolate heath is largely lost in a great city. This is only to say that the real romance of Christmas belonged to the countryside; and as this has slowly, but surely, changed, the other has tended to fade away. When the candles came to be used they were lit with the Yule Log and placed in any conspicuous place, on the mantelpiece, or the dais. In Norway as the candles burned they were conceived to radiate blessing. Many things, including clothes and food, were spread out so that the beneficent rays might fall upon them. The blazing block, however, radiating warmth, and turning, as it were, night into day, was also emblematic of Christ as the light of the world.

To our ancestors of the Latin Church Christmas was the Feast of Lights, so called after a Jewish Festival by that name, whose forms of illumination were early incorporated into the Nativity celebration and made to symbolize the fact that the darkness of the world was past and the true light now shone. The candle lights on the Christmas tree find their best explanation from this background. Everything about the Christmas fire and lights was considered very sacred. People in old England would not take the ashes out on Christmas Day "for fear of throwing them in our Savior's face"! Many attempts have been made to explain this curious notion. It has been classed with another which held it unlucky to give out fire at the season; because the household spirits might in that way be banished from the home; and they were not to be treated in that manner. Without disputing this, another context of thought and sentiment may be suggested. The sense that what was once sacrosanct could not cease to be so was very strong with those of other days. Anyone familiar with sacramental history knows how troublesome a thought it was to know what to do with the remainder of holy elements. Almost any method of disposal seemed irreverent. The aversion from throw-

ing out the ashes on Christmas day is probably indicative of a similar misgiving.

But the Christmas fire was also the author of peace and concord. Chambers in his *Book of Days* records that if a wayfarer chanced to see the great log being carried into a house he doffed his hat with becoming reverence; because he knew how potent were its powers for good at the Christmas season. Within the sphere of its genial warmth old wrongs would be forgotten, animosities would disappear, and families alienated through misunderstanding, jealousy and strife would again be united. Under the spell of the burning Yule log friendships were renewed and loves reborn. These beautiful sentiments of Charles Mackay could equally well have been thrown by him around the smiling hearth:

Ye who have scorned each other
Or injured friend or brother,
  In this fast-fading year;
Ye who, by word or deed,
Have made a kind heart bleed,
  Come gather here.
Let sinned against and sinning,
Forget their strife's beginning;
Be links no longer broken,
Be sweet forgiveness spoken,
  Under the holly bough.

Ye who have loved each other,
Sister and friend and brother,
In this fast-fading year:
Mother, and sire, and child,
Young man and maiden mild,
Come gather here;
And let your hearts grow fonder,
As memory shall ponder
Each past unbroken vow.
Old loves and younger wooing,
Are sweet in the renewing,
Under the holly bough.[7]

Nor were those who had gone from the family circle forgotten. With their voices wanting and their chairs vacant, how could they be? "Would they were with us still," says the old ballad. Though such thoughts belonged more properly to All-Hallows, yet they followed the Christmas fire. At an early stage in the history of the Yule log the spirits of the departed were believed to be present and actually imminent in the glowing embers of the hearth. Thoughts of the departed are present, if unexpressed, in the ceremonies of the father of Frédéric Mistral. The glass of wine poured over the wood is clearly a link with the times when such libations were offered to those no longer visibly pres-

[7]H. V., *Christmas with the Poets,* pp. 186-87.

ent in the home, but still there. Not thus would any now conceive "those whom they have loved and lost awhile"; yet, in the light of a purer faith, still

Mounting on love's perpetual fire.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

THE Tree, especially to the younger folks, is above all else the bright jewel in the home at the happy season. In its modern form, with its dazzling lights, shining fruits and glistening fillets, it was slow in coming. Everything else, except Christmas cards, which made their first appearance in England about the middle of the nineteenth century, had long been associated with the festival. The gay, picturesque emblem, now so familiar, belongs to post-Reformation times; but its widespread popularity was only attained during the last hundred years. It was the slow growth of many generations; and when touch upon touch brought it to its present glory and perfection the protracted story of the Christmas decorations was at last brilliantly crowned.

Its origin is a subject of considerable interest, especially in these days when it is the custom to trace everything back to its real or imaginary beginning. The temptation to relate it to the Assyrian "Tree of

the Great Light," or some Aryan equivalent, must not be yielded to. It can, of course, be done, just as the Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella of folk tale, talking birds in ballads and carols, and the Christmas ship, can be pursued till lost in the mists of antiquity. But it was not with the meanings of old world myths that the Christmas tree found its way into the hearts and homes of Christian people. Still, anthropologists are no doubt correct in seeing in it a survival in some sense of primitive tree worship, so prevalent among all nations in ancient times. The Hebrew book of *Genesis* has its Terebinths of Mamre, the Homeric epos its Oak of Dodona, Scandinavian mythology its Ash Yggdrasil, Indian legend its Bodhi Tree, while the Chinese Universe Willow is familiar wherever teacups are used. Nor was the Christmas tree the first to be decked. This is an old story, as the garlanded May pole suggests. Virgil in one place casually alludes to a Roman custom of placing images on evergreens at certain times of the year: "And thee, Bacchus, they invoke with pleasant lays, and for thee they hang soft masks from the tall pine." [1] The Arabians also regarded their date-palm as a "tree to hang things on." At an annual festival

[1] *Georg.* II, 388.

it was adored as divine and handsomely decorated "with fine clothes and women's ornaments." [2] In India artificial trees, "often constructed of the costliest materials, even of gems and gold, are carried about at marriage ceremonies, and at many festivals, such as the Hoolee, or annual festival of the vernal equinox." [3] The sacred tree is altogether a fascinating story, and runs back to that time in human thought when all plant life was conceived as instinct with the divine. We should be grateful, rather than otherwise, to those who would bid us think of the Christmas tree, as, among other things, a kind of natural sacrament linking us with the mysteries of woodland and grove.

The Christmas tree, however, as we have it, is almost entirely the creation of Christian thought and sentiment. Along one avenue came something of the old pagan reverence for the spirit of vegetation. In other words, it may be said to be the ultimate result of the union of two elements. The first was the custom of adorning houses with trees and winter greenery imported into the Nativity festival from the

[2] W. Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites,* p. 185.

[3] Sir George Birdwood, C. S. I., in *Asiatic Quarterly Review,* Vol. I, pp. 19ff.; quoted from John Ashton's *A Righte Merrie Christmasse!!!,* p. 188.

Roman Kalends of January. The second, and far more important, was a wonderful legend that told how, on the night in which Christ was born, all the trees in the forest, despite snow and ice, bloomed and bore fruit. This marvelous story was first told by Georg Jacob, an Arabian geographer of the tenth century, and eventually spread all over Europe. It was as firmly believed in as the Virgin Birth itself. In several delightful ways this old legend crops out. In one of the Coventry Mysteries, *The Birth of Christ,* it has an important place. Few, perhaps, will be sorry to meet with the famous cherry tree carol in its original form and setting. The play opens by Joseph telling Mary that he must be starting off for "Bedleem" to pay his tax, as Octavian has commanded. Mary agrees to go with him and he says:

> Now latt us forth wend, as fast we may,
> & al myghty God spede us, in our jurnay.

When they are some distance on the way, Mary espies a tree and inquires of Joseph:

> A my swete husbond! wolde ye tell to me,
> What tre is yon, standing vpon yon hylle?

JOSEPH.—For suthe Mary it is clepyd a chery tre;
In tyme of yer, ye myght ffede yow thereon yowr fylle.

MARIA.—Turn a geyn, husbond, & be holde yon tre,
How that it blomyght, now, so swetly.

JOSEPH.—Cum on Mary, that we wern at yon Cyte,
or ellys we may be blamyd, I telle yow lythly.

MARIA.—Now my spowse, I pray yow to be hold
How the cheryes growyn vpon yon tre;
ffor to have them, of ryght, ffayn I wold,
& it plesyd yow to labor' so mec'h for me.

JOSEPH.—Yo' desyr to ffulfylle I schall assay sekyrly:—
Ow! to plucke yow of these cheries, it is a werk wylde!
ffor the tre is so hy', it wol not be lyghtly
Y' for lete hy' pluk yow cheryes, be gatt yow with childe.

MARIA.—Now, god lord, I pray the, graunt me this bonn,
to haue of these cheries, & it be yo' wylle;
now, I thank it god, yis tre bowyth to me down,
I may now gader'y a nowe, & etyn my ffylle.

JOSEPH.—Ow, I know weyl I have offendyd my God i trinyte.
Spekyn to my spowse these unkynde wordys.
ffor now I beleve wel it may non other be,
but yt my spowse beryght ye kyngys son of blys.
He help us now at oure nede! [4]

(15th Cent.)

[4] *Clepyd,* called. *Lythly,* gently. *Sekyrly,* to meet. *Lyghtly,* easily. *Y',* you. *Hy',* Him. *Bonn,* favor. U-V, and V-U. William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries,* pp. 67f., and J. O. Halliwell, *Ludus Coventriæ,* pp. 95, 97.

The legend can also be found in a pleasant form in German folk tale. Christmas eve one year came quietly and without event to the lonely home of a forester. Outside the chill wind whistled through the shorn branches of the trees; but around a cheerful fire the woodsman and his family had spent a happy evening. Just as they were about to retire for the night, the sound as of someone knocking was heard outside. The father opened the door and before him stood a child shivering with cold and hunger. He was warmly welcomed, treated to the best the house afforded, and little Hans insisted that the guest should have his bed in which to sleep. Early next morning they were all awakened by a choir of angels caroling in the heavens. To their joy and amazement they discovered that it was the Christ Child whom they had entertained, for He now stood before them transfigured. Ere He disappeared, He took a twig from a fir-tree, planted it in the ground and said: "I have gladly received your gifts, and here is mine to you; this tree will never fail to bear its fruit at Christmas and you shall always have abundance." [5]

[5] T. G. Crippen, *Christmas and Christmas Lore,* pp. 151f. This book is exceedingly rich in Christmas lore of all kinds.

Sometimes the celebrated Glastonbury thorn is associated with Georg Jacob's legend of blossoming trees; but this is not altogether correct. The peculiarity of this thorn, to all appearance like any other, is that it actually blooms twice a year: in the spring and for a brief time around January 5, which is Christmas "Old Style." For a few days there are manifest signs of returning life, then "small buds come forth and burst open with a slight crackling sound and gradually the whole tree is powdered with tiny blossoms." In a few hours it is again hushed in its winter sleep. Christmas "New Style" was inaugurated in England in 1752 when September 2 was turned by law into September 14. The festival that year came twelve days earlier and so every year thereafter down to the present day. Though the Calendar was changed:

> The winter thorn, [which]
> Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord,[6]

paid no heed to acts of Parliament. It continued to bloom around January 5 (Christmas Old Style) and to the plain folks no further proof was needed to show that there had been a wicked interference with the date of the Savior's Birth. They watched to see

[6] Tennyson, *The Holy Grail.*

what the thorn would do; and when it completely ignored the new fangled notions, they would have nothing to do with them. In some parts the situation became so serious that in order to appease the people Old Christmas Day was ordered to be kept sacred as before. Nothing seemed more reasonable to people in bygone days than that Nature, as well as man, should honor the birthday of the Lord of heaven and earth. The tree was the supreme manifestation of Nature's growth and fragrant blossom its mode of speech. The existing thorn, it may be said, is not the original one; for it came to grief during Cromwellian times—"the soldiers did cutt downe that near Glastonbury; the stump remaines." The thorn now seen was grown from a shoot of the parent tree, which owed its origin, tradition said, to Joseph of Arimathea. The story relates that Joseph, on his arrival at Wyrral-hill, stuck his staff in the ground and it grew into the celebrated tree. It has been common to treat this as no more than a beautiful medieval romance, but it is possible to take quite a different view of the matter. It cannot, of course, be proved that Joseph came to Britain; nor can it be disproved. Assuming he did, and, in order to mark the limit of his pilgrimage, cut a green cudgel from

a thorn and placed it in the ground, remembering how tenacious such stocks are, "the fact," as it has been put, "of its rooting and becoming a tree may be literally true." The old Somersetshire ballad probably contains more truth than has sometimes been supposed:

> The staff het budded and het grew,
> And at Christmas bloom'd the wholdaroo
> And still het blooms at Christmas bright,
> But best tha zey at dark midnight.[7]

Reverting to the medieval legend of blossoming trees, the desire to add the note of floral praise to the Christmas festival led to some interesting and pretty customs in different parts of Europe. Boughs of hawthorn and cherry trees were cut and placed in water in a warm place, so that they might come to bloom for the sacred season. If more realized that buds of flowering trees are all formed in the late fall, and that branches cut from those whose blossom precedes the foliage would require only three or four weeks to open out, the ancient custom would surely be more widely observed than it is to-day. Sometimes whole trees would be placed in large pots in a corner of the room; and by careful attention dull

[7] *Wholdaroo,* wonder.

December became as blythe as May. People took a great pride in these trees. Their branches would sometimes be allowed to spread all along the ceiling. Friends vied with each other in the effort to have the prettiest mass of bloom at the Nativity season. "The modern Christmas tree," writes Alexander Tille, the great historian of the German Christmas, "is simply an artificial substitute for these trees and bushes in bloom." [8]

The transition from the trees of natural bloom to those artificially decorated was made in Germany. Something of the sort appears earlier in England; but it is outside the home. In connection with the Paradise Plays, ordinarily presented on the day before Christmas, trees, decked with apples and ribbons, were used on the stage. There is also a very eloquent description of a Christmastide tree, which belongs to the second year of the reign of Henry VIII:

Agaynst the xii. daye or the daie of the Epiphanie at nyghte, before the banket in the hall at Rychemond, was a pageaunt deuised lyke a mountayne, glisteryng by nyght, as though it had bene all of golde and set with stones, on the top of the whiche mountayne was a tree of golde the braunches and bowes frysed with

[8] *Yule and Christmas,* p. 176.

gold, spreding on euery side ouer the mountayne, with roses and pomegranettes.[9]

In the language of the naturalist, this gorgeous creation of royal extravagance is a kind of "sport." Quite obviously the important part of the remarkable contrivance was the "mountayne," not the tree. As it was ushered into the royal presence, in real pantomime fashion, out popped a lady clad in golden raiment, who with her henchmen and maids of honor, also suitably appareled, performed a flashing morris dance. Disappearing inside the "mountayne" the performers were removed from the hall. All this preceded the "twelfth nighte banket" proper; "rather wild perhaps," remarks the Victorian William Sandys, "for our present tastes."

The origin of the domestic Christmas tree is popularly ascribed in Germany to Martin Luther; and, remembering his tender interest in the Gospel of the Nativity, the inspiration may well have proceeded from him. The great Reformer, it is said, wandered out one Christmas Eve and became entranced with the wonder and beauty of the starry sky. Looking up he thought of Him "who for us men and for our

[9] William Sandys, F. S. A., *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*, p. lxxx.

salvation came down from heaven." On his return home he set up for his children a tree illumined with numerous candles to represent the gracious heavens that had sent forth "the little Lord Jesus" on the first *Weihnacht.* Not, however, for fifty years after Luther's death do we meet with a definite reference to any tree of this kind; and, strangely enough, it has no lights. An unknown writer about the year 1604 says: "At Christmas they set up fir-trees in the parlours at Strasburg and hang thereon roses cut out of many-colored paper, apples, wafers, gold-foil, sweets &c." [10] This bears a stronger resemblance to the trees in the Paradise Plays than to the flamboyant affair that adorned the court festival of Henry VIII. Strasburg was a center of Reform thought; for thither John Calvin betook himself when expelled from the city of Geneva in 1538. How this great father of Puritans would have viewed the tree can be guessed. With no time even to lift his head from his books and look out of the window, this ponderous scholar missed and misunderstood many of life's pleasant details. A later preacher in the Cathedral at Strasburg, Dr. Johann Dannhauer, in his *Milk of the Catechism,* inquires, with marked Calvinistic

[10] A. Tille, *Yule and Christmas*, chap. 12.

acerbity, "Whence comes the custom? I know not; it is child's play. . . . Far better were it to point the children to the spiritual cedar-tree, Jesus Christ." Many an one from the days of the fiery Tertullian down to the English Puritans of the seventeenth century had so spoken of the Christmas decorations; but fortunately they were not heeded. The tree, like the green garlands, came to stay. Its evolution and spread were slow but sure. As each generation passed it grew more and more wonderful in its appearance; and by the middle of the nineteenth century it became, and still remains, the crowning glory of the German Christmas. Firmly established in Germany it made conquests in every part of Christendom, across the Atlantic, no less than in Europe. It made its début in Paris in 1840, and about the same time crossed the English Channel. When Queen Victoria set it up in 1841 at Windsor Castle its future in England was assured; though it has never become to English people what it is to Germans. All are agreed that to see and feel the charm of the Christmas tree one must go to Germany. No useful or practical presents are ever placed upon it; these are laid on a table near by. In England they are placed underneath. In the land of Luther it is intended to

be solely a thing of beauty, and it succeeds when at night the sparklets and other embellishments shine in the glare of the gleaming candles.

The Christmas tree, though at first essentially domestic in character, soon found its way into the Church. It was there, though not in the church proper, but in the schoolroom at the annual soirée, that the children in Scotland saw it, as the writer remembers, never in the home. In some parts of America it has become the central feature in an act of worship, which proceeds in exactly the opposite way to the Office of Tenebræ. Whereas the Holy Week Service begins in light and advances with psalms and prayers, by the gradual extinguishing of candles, to almost total darkness; the other starts with only the illumination of two guardian lights; and as the messianic prophecies are declaimed, followed by the Christmas Gospel, the readings interspersed with suitable carols by the choir, the tree candles are slowly lit, till, brilliant with jets of living flame, it has become emblematic of Christ as the Light of the World. Then all join in the singing of such a hymn as "Christ whose glory fills the sky." In certain parts of Germany the tree with its twinkling lights has been given a place in the lonely graveyard

on Christmas eve; but this custom does not seem to obtain either in England or America. Of late years, however, it has become the practice in the United States and Canada to illumine evergreens on front lawns. Some avenues like Clifton Boulevard in West Cleveland, Ohio, present at the Christmas season, especially when the ground is mantled with snow, an entrancing sight. But its true place is inside the home; where, with its "numerous lights, glittering ornaments, fruit of gold and festoons of silver," it stands a thing of wonder to the children, a veritable gate of heaven. In quieter moments its real significance may be hinted; for it is a symbol of Christ, as the Tree of Life who offers freely to all His gifts of light and life and wisdom.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTMAS DELIGHTS

A GENEROUS expansion of kindly sentiment has from the first characterized the joyous festival of Christmas. It could hardly be otherwise. Glad hearts are ever open hearts; happiness and beneficence always go hand in hand. While, remembering the Roman Saturnalia, it scarcely required a special revelation to teach men to be cheerful and humane, yet the Incarnation accentuated the altruistic emotions and gave them a higher and holier sanction. The great thought of the season, overarching it like a luminous rainbow in the sky, was "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." [1] The gracious spirit of the time entered all hearts, provoking to unwonted expressions of good will.

In former days the cattle in stall and stable were never forgotten. Robert Burns in his "Farmer's Address to His Auld Mare" refers to the delightful custom:

[1] Jno. iii. 16.

A guid New-Year, I wish thee, Maggie!
Hae, there's a ripp to thy auld baggie.[18]

Anywhere else, except in Presbyterian Scotland, this would have been done a week earlier; but in the land of John Knox all ecclesiastical festivals were swept away at the Reformation flood. Such seasonable observances as survived, for the most part those of which Scots are least proud, gravitated to New Year's Day, to which, in large measure, they still adhere. Nor were the feathered creatures of the farmyard overlooked. A more liberal quantity of grain than usual was scattered among them on Christmas morning; for only in that way, said their benefactors, could they be made to share in the festive spirit of the time. Even yet in many parts of Europe the ancient custom prevails of placing a sheaf of corn in some conspicuous place, so that the birds of the air may enjoy their Christmas repast.

Charity to the poor was an essential element in medieval piety. In a manner, little comprehended now, they were akin to the penniless Son of Man and revered accordingly. To forget them was to forget Him; while to remember them was to earn His bless-

[18] *Ripp,* some unthrashed corn. *Baggie,* stomach.

ing in an unique degree in time and in eternity. Objects of tender regard at all times, they were more in mind at the Nativity season when men thought of 'Him who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor." Whether real, or imaginary, by the seventeenth century something seems to have chilled the genial currents of Christmas generosity. In one of the ballads of Samuel Pepys' collection, *Old Christmas Returned,* a writer evidently felt it necessary to make "a looking-glass" wherein the uncharitable might see themselves and how much they were to blame for their penuriousness and unconcern for those in want. This lively song waxes very sarcastic over curmudgeons and winds up with the suggestion that they:

Go hang themselves up, if they will be so kind.

But no ballad writer, nor even Thomas Tusser who made the poor at Christmas his especial concern, knew how to devise the looking-glass for miserly folk like the immortal Dickens. One of the very striking and creative passages in that weird and famous story, *The Christmas Carol,* is where the ghost of Marley addresses Scrooge in this pathetic manner:

At this time of the rolling year I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me!*

The interchange of presents at Christmas among friends has always tended to assume unconventional forms. The motto of the season on its lighter side has been: whatever be done, let it be free from formality. This has led to many quaint customs in different parts of the world. In Sweden there still survives what is called the *Julklapp,* a small but precious gift wrapped up in an enormous package. It is brought to the door by someone, who, after knocking, pushes it through and hastens off before his identity can be detected. The task of discovering the article hidden within the innumerable coverings occasions much fun. Sometimes the *Julklapp* assumes a very romantic form. A young man will have himself ensconced within and conveyed to the lady of his affections. When opened, he steps out, a suppliant for the maiden's hand. Conceivably this might prove highly embarrassing to both parties unless there was some previous certainty that the adventure would be crowned with success. Among "genteel"

folk in the same country the purveyors of the Christmas presents are a couple dressed to look like old people. The man announces their coming with a bell and out of a well laden basket the parcels are delivered to those to whom they are addressed. This is something like the Swiss Father and Mother Christmas, who, appropriately dressed, go out at the season on their jolly gift dispensing rounds to the children. No mere parcel post, or delivery wagon, can compare with these charming customs.

The mysterious purveyors of the children's gifts during the Advent and Christmas seasons in different parts of Europe are exceedingly difficult to describe. Their names and attributes disclose a most confused mixture of pagan and Christian notions. The Christian element comes through St. Nicholas, who is said to have been Bishop of Myra, in Lycia, at the beginning of the fourth century A.D. All through the Middle Ages this interesting mythical figure was very popular with girls who cherished matrimonial ambitions and also with sailors, displacing Artemis as a sea divinity among Greeks, and absorbing into himself the Scandinavian water-demon *Nikur,* dreaded by northern mariners. During his lifetime he was reputed to have been ex-

tremely wealthy, and in consequence his emblem became three purses, or three golden balls. In olden times these symbols were proudly used by certain rich Italians; but in the modern world they are employed as the sign of the ubiquitous pawnshop. The celebrated bishop, however, did not operate a loan office; but gave his money away secretly to those whom he discovered to be in need, most frequently to the poor and to marriageable maidens whose future happiness hung in suspense for lack of dowries. But his interest in the young folks, particularly boys, was supreme. Since all gifts from unknown sources were ascribed to the saint, it became the custom for parents to tell their youngsters that their presents at his festival came from him. So Barnabe Googe writes:

Saint Nicholas money used to giue
to Maydens secretlie,
Who, that he still may use
his woonted liberalitie
The mothers all their children on the ėeue
do cause to fast,
And when they euery one at night
in senselesse sleepe are cast:
Both Apples, Nuttes, and peares they bring,
and other things beside,

As caps, and shooes, and petticotes,
which secretlie they hide,
And in the morning found, they say,
that this saint Nicholas brought.[3]
(Before 1570)

In Flanders and Holland St. Nicholas is the most beloved friend of the boys and girls, especially on his own day, December 6. What Christmas Eve is to American youngsters, St. Nicholas Eve is to the children of these lands—with this difference, that people there impersonate the bishop, and in that fashion come among them to inquire into their behavior. If it is good, blessings are pronounced and rewards promised for the next morning. In Protestant Germany the Catholic saint lost ground after the Reformation. His place was taken by the Christ Child whose time of visitation became, of course, Christmas Eve. Certain other strange characters have long been active there in this connection, like *Pelznichel,* a kind of holy terror to the children; because through the Christ Child he knows all about their good and bad points; and *Knight Rupert,* who also looks closely into the conduct of the juniors and

[3] Thomas Naogeorgus (Kirchmayer), *The Popish Kingdom,* Englyshed by Barnabe Googe, ed. by R. C. Hope, 1880, "The Fourth Booke," p. 56.

bestows his favors with due discrimination. All kinds of bugbears and bogies figure in the European Christmas. By their names they suggest a loose connection with St. Nicholas; but by their activities they betray an unmistakable relationship with the weird beings of ancient pagan mythology. Yet grotesque and fearsome as they might seem, they are all kindly at bottom. Behind the gruesome mask there is a smiling face, and under the furry skin a Christian heart. Somehow in Germany *das Christkind* has not been able to preserve his original charm and simplicity. He may now be a combination of angel, infant and fairy and again a tall girl clad in white, with flowing flaxen hair. *Le bon Jésus,* or *Le petit Jésus,* in many parts of France is the benefactor of the children. *Kriss Kringle,* variously spelt, popular in America where Dutch and German customs prevail, and perhaps also Norwegian, is an extremely vague personage, though a very welcome one. The name is no doubt a corruption of the German *Kristkindlein,* the little Christ Child. But what it signifies in the minds of those who employ it is far less clear. In Norway he facilitates the movements of Santa Claus by his reindeer and sleigh, which can glide over the roofs of houses as easily as along the snow-bound highway.

In America *Kriss Kringle* means sometimes the Christ in his boyhood; at other times it is St. Nicholas. More often, perhaps, he is an attenuated form of the benevolent bishop influenced by the Holy Child and the wonders of fairyland.

In the United States everyone is familiar with Santa Claus. This jovial gentleman is a good deal of a mystery, not only to the youngsters, but also to their elders. Yet his story is not difficult to tell. The name is a corruption of St. Nicholas. It is generally believed that the celebrated bishop was brought to this country by the Dutch settlers in early colonial days; but such wonderful transformations have taken place in him that he scarcely seems now to be the same being. Not only was his name slightly abbreviated, but in the New World his pale face took on the tint of rosy apples; while from a lean ascetic he became a fat, jolly old fellow, more humanist than saint. Laying aside his canonical robes, together with his miter and pastoral staff, he chose a cap and suit of brilliant red lined and trimmed with ermine. Then, too, he traded his famous gray horse for reindeer and a sleigh. For some reason he gave up his own day, December 6, and fastened upon Christmas Eve, to which he has clung ever since. After these

accomplishments in America he recrossed the ocean and gained many adherents all the way from gloomy Scotland to sunny Australia. His dominion steadily increases; and it looks as if he might yet reign all over Christendom as the King of Christmas. In setting up his kingdom in this land Santa Claus also left behind him many undesirable ideas and practices. He does not here, except, perhaps, in the heart of Pennsylvania, carry a rod, or a bag of ashes, with which to beat naughty children. This, in any case, however effective it may have been in increasing catechetical and Biblical knowledge, was a sad perversion of the spirit of the season. Old Christmas was notoriously no respecter of persons; it cast its generous mantle over all, good and bad alike. To those, however, who will not spare the rod at this and other times it may be interesting to know that in ancient pagan times it was conceived in a thoroughly sacramental way. The "laying on" of the stick was intended to communicate the life giving virtues of the tree from which it was cut, as the cake was thought to convey the vital properties of the wheat. Thus both birch and bun were blessings, the one administered outwardly and the other inwardly! Santa Claus has divorced himself from these old-

world notions and is now altogether lovable. He is the bright and ruddy incarnation of the Christmas spirit, whose dissolution is no more to be desired than the star-spangled figure of Uncle Sam. He personifies for the children the human aspect of the happy season as nothing else could do; and surrounding his genial personality there is not a tinge of ghostly dread. But what about the after disillusionment the prosaically minded will inquire? Disillusionment! This word sounds the very keynote of mental development. Human life from beginning to end on its intellectual side is naught else but one long process of education by illusion. This also describes half the story of the human race on this planet. Many in their fancied wisdom are altogether too prone to cast aside the habits and beliefs that make childhood happy. Yet many crave, and will fondly retain wherever they can, something of the poetry and romance of old modes of thought. Late in December, 1891, President Harrison said to a correspondent in the White House:

> We shall have an old fashioned Christmas tree for the grandchildren upstairs; and I shall be their Santa Claus myself. If my influence goes for aught let me hope that my example may be followed in every family in the land.

Just why stockings came to be used as receptacles for Christmas gifts is nowhere satisfactorily explained. Their place is usually by the chimney; yet in some parts of Europe they are hung at the window on St. Andrew's Eve, November 29. In certain regions of France and Germany it is the shoe that is put out; but this belongs to the same part of the human anatomy and, of course, antedates it. Shoes play an important part in ancient folk lore. An old German custom was to place them wrongwise at the end of the bed as a protection against the alp, or nightmare. No doubt shoes and stockings were put near the fireplace for the same reason that an old boot was associated with a wedding, to bring good luck and drive away evil spirits. And once, as the story runs, great good luck came. St. Nicholas dropped a purse down a chimney which, instead of falling on the hearth, dropped into a stocking! After that, it is said, the pretty custom became popular to the everlasting delight and delectation of the children. That most ravishing rhyme, " 'Twas the night before Christmas," undoubtedly did much to make Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, and the stocking popular with young Americans. Though Clement A. Moore made no special mention of *new comes,* they are to be introduced on this wise:

Hang up the baby's stocking! Be sure
you don't forget! The dear little dim-
pled darling, she never saw Christmas
yet! But I've told her all about it, and
she opened her big blue eyes; and I'm sure
she understood it—she looked so funny
and wise. ⁘ Dear, what a tiny stock-
ing! It doesn't take much to hold such
little pink toes as baby's away from the
frost and cold. But then, for the baby's
Christmas, it will never do at all. Why!
Santa wouldn't be looking for anything
half so small. ⁘ I know what will
do for the baby. I've thought of the
very best plan. I'll borrow a stock-
ing of Grandma's, the longest
that ever I can. And you'll
hang it by mine, dear mother,
right here in the corner,
so! And leave a letter to
Santa, and fasten it on to
the toe. ⁘ Write—this
is the baby's stocking,
that hangs in the corner
here. You never have
seen her, Santa, for she
only came this year.
But she's just the bless-
ed'st baby. And now
before you go, just cram
her stocking with
goodies, from the
top clean down
to the
toe!

[3] W. F. Dawson, *Christmas and Its Associations*, p. 290.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHRISTMAS BELLS

THE Christmas Bells! There is music in the phrase and a world of infinite suggestion. Few things which man's mind has devised, and his hands have fashioned, have returned upon him with a spell more potent and gracious than bells. Belonging to the most primitive type of musical instruments, in one form and another, they have been bound up with human life in every age. It would have been surprising if the religion of the Incarnation, with its genius for consecrating common things, had not taken this time-honored talisman into its renewing and hallowing hands. Not, however, till Christmas had been well established did bells make their way into the Church. In the succeeding centuries they passed to every nook and corner of Christendom. Up rose the tower to house and locate them properly, but for which it had not been. In importance and power they almost rivaled the High Altar itself. Assuredly, if the story of the bell in Christianity alone could

be fully and properly told it would possess all the charm and fascination of the most enchanting romance.

How deeply and sincerely medieval folk reverenced and heeded the voice of their bells! They were considered by them all but human, if not more nearly superhuman. Ere they were hoisted into their eyrie in the belfry of minster, or church, they were solemnly named and dedicated by rites similar to, if not identical with, those which obtained in the Sacrament of Baptism. At all times and on all occasions their anointed tongues had something to say. Not infrequently, it is true, despite their hallowing, they served no higher purpose than their twin percussion brother the drum; but it was for other reasons, chiefly those touching upon the Joyful Mysteries of the Christian Faith, that they came to be regarded with profound veneration, not unmixed with awe. No sweeter or more meaningful tones fell upon human ears than at the hour of the evening "Angelus." To sensitive souls its arresting strokes came freighted with sacramental grace and with mystic meaning. This call to prayer, immortalized in Millet's famous picture, created the mood of worship in which a moment's thought was given to Her,

through whose humble submission our common humanity had been exalted. But it was mainly by their association with festivals, and above all with Christmas, as they reiterated the song of the angels, that bells became, and still remain, dear to the hearts of Christian mankind. In those dark chambers, high above the turmoil and strife of human life, dwelt the iron apostles of peace, whose salutations were never so welcome as at the time of the great midwinter feast.

In medieval England the joyful clamor of the bells began long before the arrival of Christmas Eve. Nor did it cease with the passing of the Holy Day, but was repeated at stated intervals during the whole octave of the Nativity, and often far beyond. The first crash was heard on the First Sunday in Advent, frequently at Vespers, and was a clarion call to prepare for the Coming of the Christ. When the unreformed missal obtained in the English Church the Epistle for the day *commenced* with the verse: "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we began." These trumpet tones of St. Paul were not only sounded from the lectern, but carried, as it were, by the bells into every home in the parish. Again the Church would begin her

annual pilgrimage from Bethlehem to Pentecost. "Tell me the old, old story," is the opening line of a hymn, not so familiar now as a generation or so ago. Whatever may be thought of the poetry, or the theology, of Miss Hankey's song, there is something very appealing in the thought of Christianity as an old, old story. In all ages the Christian Church has regarded her faith as based, not on a system of abstract ideas, but on the historical ministry of her Lord and Savior. From an early date she spread out in the worship of the year the principal events of that wonderful career, to be told and retold:

> That the Eternal and Divine
> Did, [nineteen] centuries ago,
> In very truth . . . Enough! you know
> The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
> That Life, that Death.[1]

But not only was the sacred history told; it was reënacted; and men sought to enter into it with touching and dramatic realism. Unless this is duly noted much in ancient art, poetry and devotion will be completely misunderstood. Christ's Birth, Death and Resurrection in olden times, if not now, were not merely commemorated in the anniversaries de-

[1] Robert Browning, *Christmas Eve and Easter-Day,* VIII.

voted to them; they were mystically repeated. At Advent the Church sought by an act of imaginative sympathy to enter into the mood of the Old Testament and looked eagerly and patiently forward for the coming of the promised Messiah. Like the recurrent theme of the movement of a fugue these notes appeared and reappeared in the acts of worship:

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down the Righteous One.
Let the earth open, and let her bring forth the Saviour.[2]

The season was one of rich and varied significance. It brought within view all time and all eternity. Not only was the first Coming of Christ solemnly anticipated, but also the second. Yet like the shining idea of the Kingdom of Heaven the Second Coming was never at any time carefully defined and reduced to dogmatic form. Both were left free to the spiritual imagination and to the poetry of faith. Advent symbolized all possible comings of the Lord and some of these were attached to the different weeks. The first spoke of His appearance from heaven in great humility, the second of His rebirth in the soul of every believer, the third of His coming at the death of every man, and the fourth of his

[2] Isa. xlv. 8.

final manifestation in glorious majesty at the great judgment day. With increasing frequency and vigor the bells were made to echo the chantings of the chancel. Though Christmas Eve was thus prepared for by Advent, it was not yet a part of it. The fourth week was never closed. It could not be; because, after the great assize which it symbolized, the blessedness of the saints in glory would know no end, for they shall reign for ever and ever. On the three mornings preceding Christmas hearty peals were rung—a happy reminder that the most radiant season of all the Church year was fast approaching. Then at sunset on December 24, when of old the great festival was reckoned actually to begin, the air was hung with melody. Whoso failed to listen before, listened now; for much as the evergreens and the Yule log contributed among the ancient English to the sacred Eve it would have been woefully incomplete had the sound of the Christmas bells not been heard. But they never failed on this auspicious occasion to send out their bursts of gladdening melody. Nor did any turn a deaf and indifferent ear. This was unthinkable; for from the very moment the magic tones began to quiver over the frost-bound fields, sanctity was wafted to every hall, homestead,

and cottage within the orbit of the hallowing sound.

> It is the calm and silent night!
> A thousand bells ring out, and throw
> Their joyous peals abroad, and smite
> The darkness—charmed and holy now!

A widespread custom in pre-Reformation days was to ring the bells at midnight on Christmas Eve. This important peal had a double significance. Christ was conceived to have been born at exactly twelve o'clock; and coincident with His birth Satan was supposed to have sickened and died. The great bell was tolled for an hour before midnight, as it might have been for any person who was dying. This was known as the Old Lad's Passing Bell, Old Lad being a popular nickname for the Devil. Then, at the stroke of the witching hour, lusty lads, each with a foot in the loop of a rope, and with both hands on the floss, gave a peal that made all the welkin ring. This custom has recently been revived in certain parts of England and is called the Devil's Knell. Mr. H. B. Walters, in his *Church Bells of England,* gives the formula now followed.[3] This will appear strange only to those who forget that in no land

[3] P. 138.

more than in England is there blended with faith in the present, and hope for the future, so deep a love and reverence for the past. Only there, sure of an echo in many hearts, could a poet have written:

> Old customs! O! I love the sound,
> However simple they may be;
> Whate'er with time hath sanction found,
> Is welcome, and is dear to me.

But that old notion of the demise of the Devil is not only quaint, but profoundly suggestive, and withal worthy to be revived. Students of Holy Scripture should have little difficulty in relating it to the spirit of prophecy at its very best, whose genius has always lain in seeing the end in the beginning. In a moment tense and luminous with faith and hope Jesus declared, "I beheld Satan falling as lightning from heaven"; and in a similar apocalyptic mood a disciple triumphantly cried, "The kingdom of this world *is* become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever." [4]

Bell lore contains many curious and interesting legends of sunken bells, which on special occasions were believed to send up from the depths of the earth, or the sea, their wonted music. One tells how

[4] Lk. x. 18, Rev. xi. 15.

a vessel refused to bear away the sacred bells of Whitby Abbey, which had been sold and destined for London, after this religious house was suppressed in 1539. A sorrowful company of folk assembled on the wharf to see the ship depart with its precious freight. Spreading its canvas to the breeze it started off, but in a short time quietly sank within sight of all. From beneath the waves the bells continued to greet the people and to grace their holy festivals.

Up from the heart of the ocean,
The mellow music peals,
Where the sunlight makes its golden path,
And the seamew flits and wheels.

For many a chequered century,
Untired by flying time,
The bells no human fingers touch,
Have rung their hidden chime.

Near Raleigh in Nottinghamshire there is a valley, believed to have been the work of an earthquake centuries ago, which engulfed the whole village, together with the Church. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth century it was customary for many to assemble at this place and listen for the pealing of the bells in the hidden sanctuary beneath them. And

by putting their ears close to the ground the humming tones of the magic metal could be heard; though "the rude forefathers of the hamlet" were sublimely ignorant of the fact that the sound came not up from below, but along the surface of the soil from a neighboring Church, whose ringers might be calling the parishioners to the Christmas morning service, or sending out one of the many merry peals which characterized the whole day.

The bells passed almost unscathed through the tempest of the Reformation, at least they were seldom the objects of the destructive ardor of the iconoclast. Even the ultra zealous seemed content with nocturnal missions to church towers, when, unlike Old Mortality, they piously rasped from their venerable skirts all inscriptions of papistical signification. It was after the sixteenth century that bells attained their greatest popularity in England. Smaller, doubtless, than the monsters cast in ancient times, they became far sweeter in tone, while bell ringing developed into a complicated science and a fine art. Puritanism never frowned upon the hoary denizens of the belfry, as on other elements in Christmas rejoicing; and it is often her poets who sing most delightfully of them, like Cowper in old England and

Longfellow in New England. It was the author of "The Task" who wrote these lines, true as they are beautiful:

> How soft the music of those village bells
> Falling at intervals upon the ear
> In cadence sweet! now dying all away,
> Now pealing loud again and louder still,
> Clear and sonorous as the gale comes on.
> With easy force it opens all the cells
> Where mem'ry sleeps.[5]

Charles Wesley, too, owned their spell; for "Hark the herald angels sing," originally "Hark how all the welkin rings," was inspired by the chiming of the bells on Christmas morn. Tennyson also heard and interpreted their tones. The Britisher, brought up in rural parts, who has wandered far afield, opens his *In Memoriam* on the return of the Sacred Eve and reads with fond remembrance:

> The time draws near the birth of Christ:
> The moon is hid; the night is still;
> The Christmas bells from hill to hill
> Answer each other in the mist.

In days past, on account of the perpetual pealing of bells everywhere, foreigners were wont to describe England as the "ringing island." Even now this

[5] Book VI.

would be apposite. Certainly it would be true to say that, considering the varied customs and traditions observed by the churches in different parts of the land, there would scarcely be a single hour from sunset on Christmas Eve to sunset on Christmas Evening when the bells could not be heard somewhere:

> Shaking the tall grey ivied tower,
> With all their deep melodious power:
> Proclaiming still to every ear,
> Old Christmas comes but once a year.

In northern latitudes the Christmas bells are naturally associated with frost and snow; yet in lands beneath the Southern Cross, where these elements are unknown, they are a happy and indispensable feature of the festival. New Zealand poets sing in a strain that would suit certain parts of this continent when the Nativity season rolls round:

> No touch of winter's frosty breath,
> No snowclad fields 'neath skies that lower;
> All Nature thrills with joyous life,
> As faintly from the distant tower
> Ring out the cheerful Christmas Bells.
> Hark! how their cadence softly swells
> O'er open fields and bosky dells,
> *In Excelsis Gloria!*

'Neath skies of blue the plains lie decked
In thousand varying shades of green.
Soft shadows sweep o'er meadows gay
With many a floweret's brilliant sheen;
While Christmas Bells in glad refrain
Sound the glad tidings once again
Which angels sang in raptured strain,
In Excelsis Gloria.[6]

But the bells are with us in America more in symbol, as yet, than in reality. It seems unfortunate that children everywhere in this land should be taught to sing about the merry, merry bells that usher in and welcome the Birth of Christ, and then, in all too many places, see only paper ones on Christmas cards, or in shop windows, and hear only the tinkle of glass ones on the decorated tree. But great changes are imminent. Church bells are notably on the increase and more and more their sonorous voices will help to swell the chorus of Christmas praise. And in this marvelous age in which we live it will soon be possible to listen to the tones of Great Tom of Lincoln, Peter of York and Great Paul of London, to the chimes of Old Trinity, the bells of St. Thomas and the Carillon of Grace Church in New York, and

[6] From T. G. Crippen's *Christmas and Christmas Lore,* p. 70.

others, in every corner of this vast continent. Then, in the words of John Keble, young and old may say again:

Wake me to-night, my mother dear,
That I may hear
The Christmas Bells, so soft and clear,
To high and low glad tidings tell,
How God the Father loved us well.

* * * * * *

Wake me, that I the twelvemonth long
May bear the song
About with me in the world's throng;
That treasured joys of Christmas tide
May with mine hour of gloom abide;
The Christmas Carol ring
Deep in my heart, when I would sing,
Ensuring happy months, and hallowing common days.

INDEX [1]

Adam and Eve, 92f.
Advent, meaning of, 167f.
Age of Gold, 36f.
Ambrose, St., 34
Angelus, evening, 164
Animals and the Nativity, 78, 118f.
Anno Domini, when and how first used, 19f.
Aquinas, St. Thomas, 52f.
Armenians, 32f.
Arnold, Matthew, 54f., 106
Ashton, John, 137
Audelay, John, 70ff., 82f., 97
Aurelian, Emperor, 28f.

Balder, 104-6
Basilidian heretics, 24
Bede, Venerable, 42f.
Bells, 48, chap. IX
Bonaventura, St., 57, 89
Book of Days, 132
Britain, Christmas brought to, 33
Browning, Robert, 166
Brumalia, Roman, 28
Burns, Robert, 67, 107, 117, 150f.

Cæsar, Julius, 28, 39
Calvin, John, 146
Candles, 38, 130f.
Cards, Christmas, first appearance, 135
Carol, cradle of, 57f.; cherry tree, 138; German medieval, 68; dancing origin of term, 49; singing, 75; chaps. III, IV
Charity, Christmas, 38f., 150
Chaucer, 50, 89
Chambers, Robert, 132
Cheshire cheese, yawning for, 129
Christian year, 166
Chrysostom, St., 31f., 40
Cleveland, Ohio, 149
Conception, Immaculate, 79
Conway, Prof. R. S., 37
Cowper, William, 172f.
Crashaw, Richard, 63, 91
Crippen, T. G., 140, 175

Dannhauer, Johann, 146
Dante, 50, 52
Dawson, W. F., 162
Dickens, Charles, 39, 127, 152
Dies natalis invicti solis, festival of, 29
Dill, Samuel, 28
Dinner, Christmas, origin of, 45
Dowling, A. E. P. Raymund, 104, 109
Druids, ancient mistletoe cutting ceremony, 105

Early English Lyrics, 73, 84, 87, 102f., 126; for chap. IV cf. pp. 89-159
Eden, Garden of, 92f.

[1] See also "arguments" to chapters in Contents.

Epiphany, 24ff., 33, 144
Eve, sanctity of Christmas, 116ff., 168f.
Evergreens, Christmas, 47, chap. V, 168
Exiguus, Dionysius, 19f.

Festivals, creation of in early church, 22ff.
Fire, Christmas, 120-133
Francis of Assisi, St., 52-57, 71
Freyja, 106
Friars, Grey, enter England, 68f.

Games and gambols, Christmas, 127ff.
Gay, John, 108, 128f.
Germanicus, Roman general, 44
Glastonbury thorn, 141f.
Glover, T. R., 119f.
Gnostics, 24
Googe, Barnabe, 155
Greccio, setting up crib at, 56f.
Grossart, Alexander B., 113

Halliwell, J. O., 92
Harrison, President, 160
Henry VIII, 144f.
Herbal, old English, 114
Herrick, Robert, 75f., 114, 123
Hirn, Yrgö, 57
Holly and Ivy, 102ff.
Hone, William, 39, 139
Hot Cockles, Christmas game, 127f.
Husk, William Henry, 75

Jacopone da Todi, 58-66
January, Kalends of, 39ff.
Joseph of Arimathea, 142
Julian, Emperor, 29
Julklapp, Swedish, 153

Keble, John, 176
Kissing under mistletoe, 107f.
Knox, John, 151
Kriss Kringle, 157

Lake, Kirsopp, 26
Landor, Walter Savage, 111f.
Latin Christmas hymn writers, 34, 57, 91
Libanius, 40f.
Lowell, James Russell, 120
Luther, Martin, 145

Macdonell, Anne, 66
Mackay, Charles, 132f.
Marmion, 44, 48
Mediæval Stage (E. K. Chambers), 40, 43, 126
Miles, Clement A., 31, 41, 66f., 68, 88, 123
Milton, John, 22, 92, 117
Mistletoe in Celtic and Scandinavian legend, 105f.; in church, 107
Mistral, Frédéric, *Memoirs* of, 122, 133
Mithraism, 29-32
More, Sir Thomas, 111

Nativity, Holy, challenge to faith, 91; legends of, 112, 125, 130, 140
Nicholas, St., 154ff.; Eve, 156
Nuttall, G. Clarke, 115f.

Oliphant, Mrs., 56
Otto, Rudolf, 64
Ox and Ass at Manger, 78
Oxford Book of Carols, 49, 73f.

Parish *Pax,* 110
Pax vobiscum, 108
Pepys, Samuel, 152
Plays, medieval Nativity, carols in, 84f., 138; Paradise, 92, 144

Presents, Christmas, 40, 153ff.
Puritans, English, 35, 38, 46, 74f., 110, 172

Ragg, Lonsdale, 55
Rickert, Edith, 49, 74
Rosemary at Christmas and legends, 110ff.
Ruskin, John, 65

Sabatier, Paul, 60f.
Samhain, Celtic, 42
Sandys, William (F.S.A.), 144f.
Santa Claus, 158ff.
Saturnalia, 35ff., 150
Scotland, 122, 148, 151
Scott, Sir Walter, 44, 48
Shakespeare, William, 106, 116
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 65
Silesius, Angelus, 95
Singing, carol, 75f.
Smith, Robertson, 137
Spectator (1711), 128
Spenser, Edmund, 52
Stocking, the Christmas, 161, 162
Stocks, 126
Symonds, John Addington, 63

Tennyson, Lord, 141, 173
Tertullian, 30, 147
Tille, Alexander, 42, 144, 146
Time, modes of reckoning (A.U.C., A.D., etc.), 19f.
Tree, Christmas, 131, chap. VII
Tusser, Thomas, 152
Twelve nights, origin of, 33

Underhill, Evelyn, 59ff.

Victoria, Queen, 147
Virgil, 36f., 136
Vizetelly, Henry (H.V.), 133

Walters, H. B., 169
Wesley, Charles, 173
Whitby Abbey, bells of, 171
White House, 160
Winkworth, Catherine, 67
Wordsworth, William, 64
Wreathes, modern Christmas holly, 104

Year, Christian, 166
Year, New, in Roman Empire, 39f.; Celtic and Germanic, 42; Scottish, 151
York minster, ancient mistletoe ceremony, 109
Yule, ancient name and significance in, 41ff.; Log, 120ff.

Zealand, New, bells in, 174

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01099 5365

DATE DUE

JAN 11 2008

GAYLORD PRINTED IN U.S.A.